WHEN THE “WORDS DON’T FIT YOU”

WHEN “THE WORDS DON’T FIT YOU”:

REFLECTIONS ON MADNESS AND NONSENSE

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctorate of Philosophy

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McMaster University DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY (2022) Hamilton, Ontario (English & Cultural Studies)

TITLE: When “the words don’t fit you”: Reflections on Madness and Nonsense AUTHOR: E. Scherzinger, B.A. (Hons.) (University of Toronto), M.A. (McMaster University)

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 197

**Lay Abstract**

Why do we deem certain groups of people nonsensical? Why is nonsense considered the ‘mother-tongue’ of madness? This dissertation attempts to unfold some of the dimensions of these questions through an historical taxonomy of madness and nonsense as separate yet connected phenomena; an analysis of the media and popular categorization of the Western serial killer; and feminine people deemed ‘mad’ via hysteria. Using their own experiences of madness, the author asks how we can possibly read mad articulations when they are often chalked up to nonsense, as well as the sociopolitical implications of this configuration of nonsense and madness.

**Abstract**

Divided into three substantial chapters, this dissertation centres on the interconnections of madness and nonsense. In particular, the introduction analyzes theories on nonsense literature, and the binaric logics that separately structure the discursive fields of these two phenomena. In this section, there is also a deconstruction of the problematics of analyzing nonsense as a literary technique without the influence of mad studies. The first chapter then moves to take on the figure of the Western serial killer, and the hermeneutic projects that the media takes on when reporting on his “senseless” crimes. Arguing that the labelling of the serial killer’s crimes as “nonsensical” demonstrates a particular aesthetic that works to associate madness with danger, disease, fear, and hatred within the public imaginary, this dissertation offers an analysis through a reading of Lynn Crosbie’s *Paul’s Case*. In the final chapter, this dissertation employs Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Emma Donoghue’s *The Wonder* to consider nonsensical madness within the context of feminine subjectivity. Considering autotheory as a feminist hermeneutic practice then leads into the author’s own experiences as a mad person. This dissertation aims to consider how to engage with nonsensically mad feminine texts, and the ethics of the hermeneutics of mad reading-projects.

**Acknowledgments**

For my mother, Karen Jones, who grew me inside of her. We will always be bonded.

For my father, Bruno Scherzinger, who gives the best hugs. I hope I make you proud.

For Atlas, my life saver, my little buddy, my partner in crime.

For Mad, Kath, Vannessa and Jed. You four are my sources of inspiration and safety net. I adore you.

For Joe. There are no words in any language that will even adequately capture my love for you, but a feeling does: to love you feels like sunlight warming my skin even when darkness has taken hold for days, weeks, months.

Thank you to everyone who helped me along the way, including my wonderful supervisor, Dr. Jeffery Donaldson, and my committee, Drs. Eugenia Zuroski and Grace Kehler. I would also like to thank Dr. Jijian Voronka, the best external examiner there is. Thanks are also due for Drs. Lorraine York, Roger Hyman, and Karen Balcom for your continued support.

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# **Introduction**

*“I stop for a moment, I wait, I feel my heart beating; my eyes search the empty square. I see nothing.”*

* Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea,* 55.

Nonsense and madness are concepts positioned adjacent to each other in the Western sociopolitical imaginary. This conceptualization of these elements is due to the entrenched assumption that nonsense is a linguistic expression of madness; however, regarding nonsense as simply the mother tongue of madness obscures the diverse ways that nonsense functions as a productive and destructive element with sense, and essentializes the dynamic and complex relationship between nonsense and madness. From Antoine Roquentin equating his nauseating mental anguish with “nonsense”[[1]](#footnote-1) to the back jacket of the bestseller *The Psychopath Test* claiming to take readers through “attempts to understand serial killers,” senseless murderers committing nonsensical acts from “minds of madness,” it is a central contention of my dissertation that nonsense and madness are varyingly interconnected in Western hermeneutic endeavours, particularly in ways that inscribe discourses of pathology and disease upon bodies that challenge dualist logics of rationality. Myriad texts, such as the famously nonsensical *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* or tabloid magazines reporting on the latest gruesome serial killer, feature characters and themes that ultimately entangle essentialized ideas of madness and nonsense to construct problematic representations of mad people. These ideas “are experienced as the evident laws of a natural order”[[2]](#footnote-2) that ultimately work to propagate the myth of “one single human nature.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The universal subject that has come to be normalized in Western society is most often configured as rational so long as they opt into the structures of neoliberal capitalism. Consequently, those who do not fit within the narrow confines of ‘humanity’ that this sociopolitical system defines are subject to various punitive measures, such as expulsion, interpellation, and/or surveillence. Indeed, the universal subject within the academy, a societal bastion of rationality, does little to make space for people who are categorized as ‘Other’ to the normative subject.

## **Against Interpellation and Consumption by the Rational Neoliberal University**

I consistently find myself questioning the role of my experiences and subjectivity in my research. The narrow confines of ‘worth’ are expanding within academia to include theorizations on varying experiences, opening the academy up to different forms of being that offer unique perspectives on “the dominant ideologies of society,” making them visible and “open to criticism.”[[4]](#footnote-4) I often ask myself what it means to be a mad person that writes about their experiences in an institution so similar to the dreaded psych ward. What does my work *do* for this institution with white walls, windows nailed shut or barred, and an unforgiving impetus towards productivity? Why do I continually perform and employ academia’s primary valued logics of reasonability and rationality, when these structures, as I discuss in this dissertation, continue to directly oppress and misrepresent the mad facet of my subjectivity? To help answer some of these questions, I turn to Sara Ahmed’s thoughts on the subject within the context of institutional life in her text, *On Being Included*. Particularly analyzing the role of race and diversity in academic institutions, Ahmed notes that differing experiences are incorporated into universities and colleges with “ease.”[[5]](#footnote-5) In her academic positions, Ahmed was categorized as “the race person,” in which “people of color [are] interviewed for jobs ‘on race’ by white panels, speaking to white audiences about [her] work. […] Becoming the race person means you are the one who is turned to when race turns up. The very fact of your existence can allow others not to turn up.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Such is also the case with those who experience madness and the varying manifestations of disability.

Indeed, to be turned to for discussions on madness and disability works to interpellate my neurodiverse mind and disabled body into the neoliberal institution, a dynamic that is problematic, induces ambivalent feelings. It follows that, to be hailed into an institution, I have effectively performed the “norms [that] operate to produce certain subjects as ‘recognizable.’”[[7]](#footnote-7) Judith Butler, reading Louis Althusser’s example of a policeman calling to a citizen on the street who turns towards the call, determines that this scene illustrates the paradoxical nature of subjectivity. Butler writes that the term “subjection” holds two meanings, and therefore “contain[s] the paradox of power as it both acts upon and activates a body.”[[8]](#footnote-8) She continues on, “If the word subjection (*assujetissement*) has two meanings, to subordinate someone to power and to become a subject, it presupposes the subject in its first meaning, and induces the subject in its second.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Returning to Althusser’s police officer with this in mind, Butler essentially argues that his institutional and external force produces the called via subjection. Noela Davis argues, “Butler proposes that there exists a prior readiness or desire whereby the subject-to-be is *already* in complicity with the law that brings it into being,”[[10]](#footnote-10) as “social existence can be guaranteed only by the law,”[[11]](#footnote-11) according to Butler’s readings of implications in Althusser. Although Davis falsely assumes that it is the law quite literally, and not the concept of institutionalism, that Butler draws from Althusser, her summarization of the former’s views on interpellation is excellent; Butler’s theories on interpellation imply that social recognition is only available through engagements with subjugation by institutions, producing guilt on the part of the subject that makes us “willing to suffer reprimand [...] in return for the intelligibility that subjectivity brings us.”[[12]](#footnote-12)In other words, to be recognized by the academic institution provides a certain degree of validity to my life, in that I have been “qualif[ied] […] as a life,”[[13]](#footnote-13) and therefore worthy of, in Butler’s terms, “grievability.” In *Frames of War,* Butler outlines how lives that matter are interpreted along “schemas of intelligibility [that] condition and produce norms of recognizability,” which then “prepare the way for recognition.”[[14]](#footnote-14) “[G]rievability,” then, “is a presupposition for the life that matters.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Thus, to be recognized in the institution as an epistemological source that matters, even within the frame of neoliberal ideologies that directly oppress my subjectivity, means that I *qualify*. I *matter*, and I am grievable. To mad body-minds like mine that are often deemed nonsensical (read: irrational, unintelligible, and therefore useless) and subjected to heinous biopolitical measures that directly affect our already tenuous thresholds between life and death, this recognition is significant, and stands as a point of ambivalent pride.

It is important to note that I sometimes have the benefit of passing as a normative body, thus requiring a disclosure for readers to fully understand my position in my work; however, I also recognize that disclosures are incredibly fraught. Aside from reanimating the affectual responses I experience from disclosing my mental illnesses (shame, fear, frustration, helplessness), do I need to partake in this articulation in order to prove my credibility, to stake a claim in this theoretical conversation? Furthermore, Ahmed suggests, “The imperative to transform all experience into writing can reduce the value of an experience by treating experience as a means to this end.”[[16]](#footnote-16) What does the relaying of my experience of mental illness and resulting trauma in my dissertation accomplish? In writing about my experiences, are they destined to be consumed by the neoliberal university as “a means to an end”?

Similar to Ahmed who also questions her institutional experiences, I see the trauma often resulting from inhabiting a “diverse” body incorporated into neoliberal capitalist institutions as a solution to the crisis that these bodies present. Moreover, As Eric Cazdyn suggests, “[C]rises are built right into many systems themselves; systems are structured so that crises will occur, strengthening and reproducing the systems.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Crisis discourse is then deployed to “justify mishap and misfortune,” and “to explain inequality and injustice”[[18]](#footnote-18) that occurs within the same system. Aside from the cultural capital that academic institutions garner from theoretical work produced under their name, interpellating diverse bodies into scholarly spaces averts the crisis of disrupting the neoliberal academic enterprise that these bodies push against. Thus, in reconfiguring diverse bodies and their resulting traumas as “productive” and “worthy” of academic study, the university recalibrates a potentially revolutionary subjectivity into a useful, neutralized, and monetized element within its structure. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, bell hooks references Stephen Heath, who argues, “The real problem and task is always one of social revolution. Privileging the sexual […] functions only too easily as an instance by development of and reference to which society guarantees its order outside of any effective process of transformation, produces precisely a containing area and ideology of “revolution” or “liberation.””[[19]](#footnote-19) Following a similar logic, providing space for disability, and, in particular, madness in academic institutions ensures its containment rather than acknowledging oppressive societal structures and offering a “moment when a new set of relations [can] tak[e] hold within a different system.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Indeed, some disabled people “can easily be brought into the life of the nation without challenging its ableist structures.”[[21]](#footnote-21) In tandem, the grammars of neoliberal crisis and governmentality assume a failure in the individual and not the governing structures, a logic often used against mad peoples via discourses of dis/ease; in Canada, mentally ill people are medicated and psychologically managed for the purpose of productively functioning within hegemonic society. The onus of “management and pre-emption”[[22]](#footnote-22) is entirely displaced onto mad peoples instead of a restructuring of the systems that preclude mad peoples from engaging with broader society in the first place. Resultingly, any step into madness is considered a failure on the part of the individual to keep themselves contained, “managed,” and productive, a failure more often projected onto feminine and racialized people. As Ahmed states, “We can get stuck *in* institutions by being stuck *to* a category”[[23]](#footnote-23) in more ways than one.

Ultimately, I feel as though I have no choice but to disclose; my experiences with mental illnesses, and the resulting trauma that institutions impose upon me, have, in Eli Clare’s terms, “shaped every part of my life. This is not hyperbole, not a claim to perpetual victimhood nor a ploy for sympathy, but rather an enraging truth.”[[24]](#footnote-24) To claim madness as a facet of my identity is not to wallow in what right and left wing ideologies deem “identity politics,” which Tobin Siebers notes is not considered legitimate because they are founded upon recognizing the imposition of pain and suffering upon populations outside the norm Indeed, identity has fallen out of fashion following a slow decline beginning with Enlightenment rationality and autonomy, “which represents the inability to reason as the sign of inbuilt inferiority.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Linda Martin Alcoff notes, “The norm of rational maturity required a core self stripped of its identity,” resulting in this ideology’s assumption that populations overdetermined by their “identities were deemed incapable of full autonomy,”[[26]](#footnote-26) an ideology that valorized racist views that demanded non-white populations assimilate to assumedly superior Eurocentric culture. In the contemporary time period, sociopolitical discourses and academic environments often “banish identity when they associate it with lack, pathology, dependence, and intellectual weakness,”[[27]](#footnote-27) citing concerns about identity as contrived and/or basic forms of analysis that prioritize the affective and embodied experiences of historically marginalized groups rather than the white, cishetero men that founded these Western institutions through exclusion and exploitation; however, I believe that discussing madness and disability as intersecting facets in my identity are crucial to this dissertation as a whole, as my madness not only affects the way I exist in the world, but, more pruriently, shapes the way I materially and affectually engage with the university. Although the aforementioned scholars may argue “that identity politics cannot be justified because it is linked to pain and suffering,” I agree with Siebers that suffering does not produce “weak identities.”[[28]](#footnote-28) This belief “both enforces the ideology of ability and demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of disability: disability is not a pathological condition, only analyzable via individual psychology, but a social location complexly embodied.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

## **A History of Madness: Foundations of Meaning**

Madness and theoretical work on this concept, as suggested in Michel Foucault’s *History of Madness*, is a relatively recent development. Our contemporary Western perception of madness is founded upon a categorical separation of madness and reason, a slow development that consequently also divorced meaning from madness via processes of pathologization, feminization, and abjection. This dynamic is grappled with in *Alice’s Adventures*, which brings nonsense and madness together, and consequently “critiqu[es] and transcend[s] […] psy-centred [(i.e., objective, scientific, reasonable)] ways of thinking, behaving, relating, and being.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Together these phenomena work to directly criticize foundational Western philosophical assumptions of universality, reasonability, and binaric logics that are often the foundations of theories on nonsense.

Foucault’s *History of Madness* is a seminal work of cultural theory that outlines three eras that substantially fostered the disassociation of madness and reason: the Renaissance, the Classical Age, and the contemporary period. This chronological history then illuminates how madness, as Ian Hacking summarizes, “requires a specific organization of thought to categorise [mad people] […] in terms of mental disorder.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Similarly in his introduction to *History of Madness,* Jean Khalfa notes that the “conceptions” of madness that Foucault painstakingly details “are not discoveries but historical constructions of meaning.”[[32]](#footnote-32) Foucault outlines the conceptualizations of madness throughout different historical eras to specify how “each phase reflects […] a different mode of production of society itself through a different system of exclusion,”[[33]](#footnote-33) historicizing the societal exclusion of mad people, the rise of psy-centred, ‘sensical’ structures of power, and the current discursive production of madness. In order to further discuss the contemporary relation between nonsense and madness, I want to return to the Classical philosophical roots of the values we use in hermeneutic projects. This approach takes from Michel Foucalut’s ‘genealogical analysis,’ which unearths how current societal operations and institutions are produced from struggles and epistemes of power. There is not an impetus to unearth the ‘origins’ of said dynamics. Instead, David Garland describes this analysis as grounded in “trac[ing] the erratic and discontinuous process whereby the past became the present: an often aleatory path of descent and emergence that suggests the contingency of the present and the openness of the future.”[[34]](#footnote-34) The temporal element of this analysis seeks to problematize the contemporary manifestations of power, and interrogate the histories that have established these relations.

What are the foundational philosophies that inform dominant Western interpretive frameworks in Western society? Functioning on core values of universality, rationality, reason, and transcendental truth, the Classical era of philosophy features a distinctive perspective on madness “as an inexplicable, divine visitation, to be tolerated, pitied, and sometimes even honoured.”[[35]](#footnote-35) This conceptualization of madness characterized the ambivalent treatment of mad people until the Age of Reason; however, I want to meditate on Plato’s *The Republic* to analyze how a Classical philosopher handles madness. *The Republic,* which is written as a dialogue between Socrates and the other philosophers trying to build an ideal city, suggests that there is part of the soul that is irrational and puzzling. Socrates argues that falsehoods degrade this part of the soul, which must be protected due to its vulnerability to corruption. The philosophers define “falsehood” as “someone us[ing] his story to misrepresent the nature of gods and heroes.”[[36]](#footnote-36) These men move on to discuss poetry, an art form that Socrates labels as unreasonable, emotionally centred, and the locus of falsehoods. Initially, Socrates and the other philosophers are hesitant to allow narrative falsehood and poetry into their ideal city, because poetry “corrupts the element of [the soul] that reasons.”[[37]](#footnote-37) They eventually agree that any falsehoods spoken or written are simply a “representation of falsehood as experienced in the soul.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Thus, the soul contains an ability to experience a representation of falsehood, like poetry, and they conclude that this experiencing is relatively harmless. In other words, the part of the soul that experiences emotions when reading a poem, for example, is not threatening.

The philosophers return to this topic later in the text, specifically in their theorizations of forms. They again argue about poetry, suggesting that poets “produce mere illusions of goodness and the other subjects they make their poems about, and have no hold on the truth.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Clearly, these men are worried about “truth”; they show concern for illusory, false goodness. Their concern is centred on the part of the soul that experiences emotions when reading poetry that has “no hold on the truth,” as stated previously in *The Republic.* This discussion is foundational to later philosophies, such as Cartesian dualism, as *The Republic* outlines a binary between the emotional and reasoning part of the soul, in which the reasoning facet is considered much more important. This anxiety over the soulful experience of representations of falsehood demonstrates that many Classical philosophers perceived poetry and art as representations of meaning, but specifically meaning that was separate from the ideal style of meaning-making.[[40]](#footnote-40) What is remarkable, here, is that the Socratic dialogue of *The Republic* is one of the first examples in which “[m]eaning was no longer read in an immediate perception.”[[41]](#footnote-41) In other words, the philosophers acknowledge that there are other ways to produce meaning beyond reason, and these alternative methods of production may result in a non-universalized meaning. Indeed, this discussion in *The Republic* articulates that one poem may produce multiple meanings, so there is no universal truth to a piece of art that viewers or listeners inherently understand upon consumption.

Following in this vein, Elizabethan writer and philosopher Philip Sidney wrote a defense of poetry against these Platonic anxieties. He lays out four “important imputations” against “poor poets”[[42]](#footnote-42) and attempts to recalibrate apprehensions over the artistic productions of poets. Sidney begins with a clear demarcation of poetry’s place in every society as a pedagogical tool and entertainment resource. As such, he defends poetry against philosophers’ definitions of goodness, rightly pointing out that it is not knowledge that gives an individual the desire and motivation to be virtuous: “it is not the *Gnosis,*” he states, “but *Praxis* must be the fruit.”[[43]](#footnote-43) Essentially contending that it is the process of acquiring knowledge, or “wit,” Sidney explains, “[W]here once reason hath so much overmastered passion as that the mind hath a free desire to do well, the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher’s book.”[[44]](#footnote-44) In other words, poetry is one of the best methodologies of seeking knowledge, comparable to a philosophical study. Sidney concludes his refutation of the four charges against poets with a summary:

it [poetry] not being an art of lies, but of true doctrine; not of effeminateness, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man’s wit, but of strengthening man’s wit; not banished, but honoured by Plato: let us rather plant more laurels for to engarland the poets’ heads [...] than suffer the ill-favoured breath of such wrong-speakers once to blow upon the clear springs of poesy.[[45]](#footnote-45)

He ultimately argues that poetry is not dangerous due to mimesis, as Plato suggested, but is rather a pedagogical tool that encourages masculine virtue and intelligence. Ultimately, Sidney does “not deny but that man’s wit may make poesy, which should be *Eikastike* (which some learned have defined: figuring forth good things).”[[46]](#footnote-46)Notably, Sidney constructs a binary between *Eikastike,* or poetry oriented towards truth and morality, and *Phantastike,* which he defined as poetry that can “infect the fancy with unworthy objects.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Thus, even though he throws himself into the proverbial ring in favour of poetry, Sidney still contends with “abuse” of the art[[48]](#footnote-48); despite his acknowledgement of the *praxis* of poetryas crucial to the production of significance and knowledge, as well as the sole ability of poets to provide education in this field, Sidney concedes that there are some sensate experiences that cannot and should not be communicated, deeming some poetry “more hurt[ful] than any other army of words,”[[49]](#footnote-49) as one “with a sword [...] mayst kill thy father, and with a sword thou mayst defend thy prince and country.”[[50]](#footnote-50) What I find the most remarkable about Sidney’s binaric construction of the *Eikastike* and *Phantastike* (sometimes written as *fantastike*) is the “conjunction of madness and creativity,” which “is a common concern in Western culture writ large.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Indeed, while Sidney extols the virtues of *Eikastike* poetry, the *Phantastike* functions as an obstinate trapdoor that is deployed throughout Eurocontinental philosophy, effectively separating madness from white, masculine, and therefore rationalist forms of creativity in poetry, a genre that can then be, according to Sidney, utilized for disseminating Enlightenment knowledges and methodologies that are fundamentally grounded in reason and diametrically opposed to societal constructions of madness. Thus, madness was stripped of its potentiality as a source of knowledge, along with any assumed hermeneutic abilities and agency.

Concerns about madness were carried into other philosophical and critical texts, such as Alexander Pope’s “Essay on Criticism,” and Edmund Burke’s inquiry into the sublime, two texts that establish reason and sense within the broader Enlightenment conversation on aesthetics and creativity. In fact, the introduction to Pope’s essay suggests that his work synthesized the characteristics and tenets of the Classical period into a manual that provides a grammar for the practice of proper criticism, effectively “reduc[ing] chaos to order” and “defin[ing] what was unfixed.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Evidenced in Pope’s own words, he wrote that a good critic should “love to praise, with reason on his side.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Burke also emphasizes the underpinnings of reason that are now considered characteristic of Enlightenment criticism, arguing, “If we suffer ourselves to imagine, that their senses present to different men different images of things, this sceptical proceeding will make every sort of reasoning on every subject vain and frivolous.”[[54]](#footnote-54) These writings, indicative of the authors’ respective theses, quietly express a rising concern at the time that circulated around and within the discourse of aesthetics at its conception, as aesthetics stands as a major philosophical predecessor to modern hermeneutic considerations. More to the point, its birth is “symptomatic of an ideological dilemma inherent in [the] absolutist power” of reason.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Foucault notes, “[B]efore madness was brought under control towards the mid-seventeenth century, […] it was linked obstinately to many of the major experiences of the Renaissance.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Foucault locates representations of madness at this time in the fool, a jokester that was a symbol of society’s relationship to reason and truth. The fool “has no place in his sottish language” for reason, “but his words bring a reason that comically undoes the comedy.”[[57]](#footnote-57) As a result, the fool’s comedy was perceived as “the harbinger of truth” when “all bearings are lost.”[[58]](#footnote-58) The fool carries “the inaccessible, fearsome knowledge that the madman, in his innocent foolishness, already possesses,”[[59]](#footnote-59) a representational archetype that is still deployed in modern depictions of madness. The diction that Foucault uses to describe the fool is quite interesting, as it sets a tone oppositional to humour. Indeed, Foucault describes the fool’s comedy or the madman’s articulations as a “harbinger,” which imbues his statement with an ominous tone. What “fearsome knowledge” could the fool be trying to tell us? Foucault suggests this knowledge is the knowledge of meaninglessness, writing,

From the knowledge of that fatal necessity that reduces man to dust we pass to a contemptuous contemplation of the nothingness that is life itself. […] Death as the destruction of all things no longer had meaning when life was revealed to be a fatuous sequence of empty words, the hollow jingle of a jester’s cap and bells. […] [M]adness was the being-already-there of death.[[60]](#footnote-60)

In other words, thinking about the “nothingness that is life itself” that was the state of reality during the Renaissance, with all its plagues and wars shaping everyday life, offers no point in living, but also no point in dying, effectively producing a fruitful terrain of contestation in matters of significance.

This archetype of the knowledgeable madman is still visible in contemporary society, particularly in media. As an example, the third season of the Netflix show *Ozark* features a character named Ben, who is locked up in a psychiatric ward by his sister, Wendy, after he reveals how much he knows of Wendy’s drug laundering scheme to her employer, a handler working for the Mexican drug cartel. When Ben’s girlfriend visits him in the ward, he tearfully explains to her, “Tell me what I did that’s so insane that I need to be locked up. What exactly am I wrong about? […] It’s not fair. None of it.”[[61]](#footnote-61) In the next episode, Ben escapes the psychiatric ward, and explains to a taxi driver, “I’ve never been a person other people can force into a thing. I mean, I’m peaceful, I’m loving, but I’m not like the others. I’m not. I’m not like the others, and I will not fall in line with the others. When they’re saying, “This is normal, what you walked into is normal, what we built here is normal, and your reaction to it is wrong. That’s not normal.” No, no.”[[62]](#footnote-62) He then goes to the house of Wendy’s employer, where he yells at her for her crimes, which she labels and dismisses as nonsense, telling her daughter, “He’s very sick. […] He doesn’t know what he’s saying.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Eventually, Wendy turns Ben over to her employer, and he is killed by a cartel assassin because he stands as a liability to their money laundering enterprise. The liability, in this instance, is Ben’s knowledge of the cartel’s crimes, and his refusal to keep this “fearsome knowledge” hidden, as well as behave normatively.

I use the character arc of Ben in the third season of *Ozark* to point out the ways in which madness is entirely interpretive; in contemporary media, madness is still moulded and represented in certain ways for the convenience and consumption of Western rationalist populations. Indeed, Wendy attempts to atone for Ben’s outburst in her admission to her employer that her brother is “insane.” In using Ben’s madness as a reason to both dismiss his very real anxieties about his sister’s involvement with a violent drug cartel, and silence him via assassination, Wendy’s actions subscribe to the Platonic binary, in which madness, emotions, and irrationality are secured on one side, and rationality, reason, and truth are fortified on the other. In other words, Ben and Wendy act as foils for each other, siblings who stand on the ‘mad’ side of the binary, and the rational side of the binary, respectively. Furthermore, Wendy’s actions demonstrate the ways in which madness is interpreted for the purposes of sane populations, which is only possible because reason “interior[ized]” madness as “a strength and a momentary need to be sure of its own powers.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Like a Cazdyian crisis, madness was interpellated into reason in order for reasonability to define itself against.

The Age of Reason featured the stripping of knowledge and meaning from madness as a central tenet. To summarize, the sensate world, up until the Age of Reason, was tolerated as a space “impenetrably opaque to reason,”[[65]](#footnote-65) and innocently associated with folly, illusions, art, and, in the deep recesses, mad knowledge. This realm of experience posed a threat to the blossoming Western “absolute monarch of Reason” and “its legitimacy.”[[66]](#footnote-66) Consequently, the emotional side of the soul in Plato’s binary was disarmed as a source of knowledge and meaning-making, and yet there was that Cazdyian interpellation of madness into reasonability in order to shift its role from crisis to a brick in the systems and institutions of reasonability. This double movement of interpellating and expelling madness required a conceptualization of madness to stand as a foil to reason, and the figure of the dirty, nonsensical, unpredictable, dangerous, and monstrous madman was thus born. As featured in the Enlightenment, the societal treatment of madness was deplorable, with the beginning of the most violent “[c]onfine[ment]” of mad people to asylums and institutions to “hid[e] unreason.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Paradoxically, hiding madness away “put [it] on show, pointing it out at arm’s length” to widely dehumanize mad people and regard madness as a form of “amusement for […] reason,” but only if contained “at a carefully controlled distance.”[[68]](#footnote-68) During the Age of Reason, madness was, as a state of being, objectified and thrown into darkness, subject to illumination only by the light of reason, and thus always within reach of reason and rationality.

I just recently detailed a difficult representation of madness in contemporary media through Ben, a single-season character used in the television show *Ozark* to add irrationality to the already impossible situation of money laundering; however, beyond major pieces of media, I argue that madness is currently experiencing a renaissance like never before in the way that it is conceptualized in Western society thanks to disability justice. Madness sits at a unique crossroads in disability, as it can be “closet[ed]” or clearly “witnessable.” As disability justice activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes, “This [book] is for those of us who cannot hide our disability, Madness, Deafness, and illness — whose witnessable disability is just a fact of life that becomes a bullet target for violence, for attempts by police, doctors, and families to murder us and lock us up.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Although there is still a disproportionate amount of violence that we are exposed to, especially QTBIPOC mad people, disability justice movements have offered respect and space for mad people writing their own histories; creating their own care networks and plans; and advocating against the medical industrial complex. Of course, these realities are hard won by sick and disabled BIPOC, who experienced ableist oppression at the hands of white settler colonialism. As Piepzna-Samarasinha notes, “Disabled Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill has remarked that in precontact Cherokee, there are many words for people with different kinds of bodies, illnesses, and what would be seen as impairments; none of those words are negative or view those sick or disabled people as defective.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Indeed, white settler colonialism and ableism are inextricable from each other, as “500+ years of violence against Black and brown communities includes 500+ years of bodies and minds deemed ‘dangerous’ by being non-normative.”[[71]](#footnote-71) Piepzna-Samarasinha points out how

[s]ick, disabled, Mad, Deaf, and neurodivergent people’s care and treatment varied according to our race, class, gender, and location, but for the most part, at best, we were able to evade capture [under transatlantic enslavement, colonial invasion, and forced labour] and find ways of caring for ourselves […]. At worst, a combination of legal and societal ableism plus racism and colonialism meant that we were locked up in institutions or hospitals, “for our own good.” The Ugly laws, on the books in the United States from the mid-1700s to the 1970s, stated that many disabled people were “too ugly” to be in public and legally prevented disabled people from being able to take up space in public. The Ugly Laws were interwoven with a mass creation in the 1800s and onward of hospitals, “homes,” “sanitoriums,” and “charitable institutions” where it was the norm for disabled, sick, mad, and Deaf people to be sequestered from able-bodied “normal society.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

These histories of societal and aesthetic normativity are necessary to note within this dissertation, which joins analyses of narratives and characters in Canadian literature that are coded as mad alongside historic and contemporary deployments of nonsense within cultural texts. Put simply, the fictional representations of the white male serial killer and his “senseless” crimes, as well as that of the unintelligible mad feminine subject are considered with attention to the philosophies, paradoxes, and propositions of nonsense. While the two figures of the white male serial killer and the nonsensical feminine subject may seem at odds in this conversation, in that grouping a predator and a vulnerable feminine population together clearly implies a power imbalance, I think that these figures as a pair, when considered through a feminist postructural framework that prioritizes the realities of vulnerable poeoples, offer unique representations of how nonsense is deployed within the Western world. This deployment has, as Piepzna-Samarasinha notes, very material implications for mad people experiencing the intersections of ableism, patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, and racism.

## **Historicizing the Rabbit Hole: Theoretical Notions of Nonsense**

Theoretical work on the relation between madness and nonsense is not extensive. As such, this dissertation contends that reading and analyzing texts that theoretically deploy and culturally represent both elements will illuminate the interconnections between madness and nonsense within the context of Western hegemonic society. Indeed, as Hannah Dyer writes in her aesthetic analysis of childhood artwork and its queer dimensions, “[A]rt allows us to inhabit alternative narratives in which the past returns and is remembered for its ability to clarify the psychosocial dynamics of the present.”[[73]](#footnote-73) As such, this dissertation employs analyses of artistic texts ranging from 1865 to 1997 that depict nonsense and madness to explore the ways in which past representations of these phenomena “clarify” and expand upon their current depictions and experiences.

The most famous nonsensical text, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland,* is a children’s book that has generated extensive yet mutually exclusive analyses of both nonsense and madness and their roles in the text. Unfortunately, a lot of work in this area attempts to ‘make sense’ of the text. These theoretical inquiries serve as the foundation of nonsense theory; however, they tend towards reifying normative Western hermeneutic processes that control and legitimate meaning via dualist logics. In this introduction, I consider the difference between interpretations of *Alice’s Adventures* that contain madness in their lines of inquiry, and those that do not for two purposes: to articulate my broader assertion that positioning nonsense as merely an excessive display of madness is a disservice to both readings of nonsense and non-normative hermeneutic projects; and to illustrate the latent assumptions about nonsense and madness that haunt current gaps in the theoretical fields of nonsense and hermeneutics, as well as Western sociopolitical discourses. Indeed, the typical conceptualizations of nonsense and madness stand as a direct result of their status as elements that “needed to be *explained* — and could not be.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Many of the lacunae in nonsense theory are forged by ignoring madness in analyses of the challenges to meaning that nonsense whips into frenzy. Theorists who massively underestimate the potentiality of madness as a non-normative positionality not only ignore the productive relationship between madness and nonsense, but also disregard the affectual and societal ripples that these phenomena contain, influence, stir, and instigate when circulating in society together. I argue that these two phenomena are not voids of meaninglessness and nothingness.[[75]](#footnote-75) Instead, nonsense functions as one of the infinite and multifaceted logics of madness, which, through articulation, works to free the latter subjectivity by undermining oppressive boundaries of fixed identities, binaries, and stable, objective meaning.

Rather than reframing the hegemonically abject concepts of madness and nonsense as valuable and important ways of being and making meaning, theorists of nonsense tend to erase or omit the mad qualities of nonsense, instead choosing to ‘make sense’ of it by deploying dualist logics. For example, theorist of nonsense Hugh Haughton, in his introduction to the Penguin Centenary Edition of *Alice’s Adventures*, picks the text apart, diverting responsibility for the hermeneutic and political implications of his reading to the belief that “introductions tend to mean explanations.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Haughton begins his introduction with the suggestion that the text’s nonsense functions in response to many of the societal changes at the time of Carroll’s writing: “Alice is confronted by grave travesties of most of the institutions which govern her and her author’s life — the monarch, the rule of law, education, grammar and social etiquette,”[[77]](#footnote-77) as evidenced in the trial over which the Queen of Hearts presides. More broadly, the nonsense in *Alice’s Adventures* “thrives on travestying [the] authority”[[78]](#footnote-78) of Western society’s most foundational institutions, which have come to represent the apex of rationality. This reading is readily available and arguably undeniable, but the rest of Haughton’s analysis then continues to suggest that “we could classify readers of the books as either Gryphons or Queens.”[[79]](#footnote-79) Here, I argue, is the rub: attempts to apply binaric logics to nonsensical texts structure nonsense and sense into singularities, individual apolitical elements that produce meaning and significance, which are in turn also constrained by a binary opposition. Haughton demonstrates an awareness of “the problem of meaning” that “haunts the text and its heroine,” as well as “its readers,”[[80]](#footnote-80) but, like Alice, attempts to employ methods of interpretation that are directly counteractive to revealing the dynamic relationship between the nonsense and madness of the text, such as categorization, structuralization, binaric formulations, and an expected stability of meaning. To engage in this kind of structural reading of nonsense “may preserve the coherence of the reading,”[[81]](#footnote-81) but closes off the text’s infinite potentiality. It is important to note that Haughton acknowledges the text’s “absurd and riddling parables of narrative and linguistic innocence, but [these devices] are also allegories of experience: incarnations of philosophical sophistication and perverse intellectual wit”[[82]](#footnote-82); however, his hermeneutic practices imply a prioritization of the signification of concepts over the manifestation of a subject, which ultimately constrains meaning and nonsense within a dualist logic that works to repress madness.

In analyzing theoretical responses to nonsense and sense within *Alice’s Adventures*, I primarily intend to explore what arises when madness and nonsense are put into conversation with each other via comparing and contrasting the works of Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Elizabeth Sewell, two foundational theorists of nonsense, and Gilles Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense*. The former theorists, I note, perceive nonsense and sense as conceptually beholden to an oppositional logic. In other words, nonsense and sense are positioned as oppositional elements within a binary of meaning and significance. In comparison, Deleuze introduces madness and its disruptive nature into his analysis, freeing these phenomena from their constraints in order to ultimately proliferate meaning outside of binaries. Ultimately, I argue that the structuring of nonsense and sense as diametrically opposed reduces and simplifies these two elements into stable singularities functioning to reinforce Western processes of meaning-making. In particular, nonsense and sense are turning points that indicate an actively occurring hermeneutic process, but mobilized to presuppose a process of deviance that then functions to restrict significance within the boundaries of Western acceptability. Deleuze, in contrast, introducing madness into analyses of nonsense and sense disturbs the dualist logics that constrain these elements, and instead offers a conceptualization of these two phenomena as existing in an effectual, flowing, and infinite state, drifting upon the surface of language in order to produce and complicate significance.

“[T]he genre” of nonsense, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle suggests in his foundational text, is “structured by [a] contradiction, which [he] eventually formulate[s] in terms of a dialectic, between over-structuring and de-structuring, subversion and support.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Like Haughton, Lecercle uses a philosophical reading of *Alice’s Adventures* to set up nonsense as an element structured and effectively defined by its contradictory nature. Lecercle argues that nonsense, as a genre and style

is a by-product of the development of the institution of the school, that the texts provide an imaginary solution to the real contradiction between the urge to capture an ever wider proportion of the population for the purpose of elementary schooling, and the resistance […] that such a cultural upheaval inevitably arouses.[[84]](#footnote-84)

In this characterization, Lecercle implies that literary nonsense was produced as a direct result of tensions between “free[dom] and constrain[t]”[[85]](#footnote-85) that occur from the institutionalization of rationality and “common sense.”[[86]](#footnote-86) Lecercle’s text then hermeneutically functions through a logic of “compensation,”[[87]](#footnote-87) or one of “excess and lack.”[[88]](#footnote-88) For example, in his detailing of the infamous and impossible raven riddle at the Mad Tea-Party, Lecercle asserts? that both Carroll and the Mad Hatter “mean […] not to mean,” a nonsensical intention that leads to a cognitive impetus in the reader to “produce the absent meaning”[[89]](#footnote-89); the lack of recognizable meaning “offered by the author of the text,” leads to a stronger “need and desire for full meaning” in the reader.[[90]](#footnote-90) This logic imposes a binary upon nonsense in which the “excess and lack” of sense effectively determines the phenomenon’s ability to hold and relay meaning, and, in so doing, forecloses on alternative logics of nonsense and significance that hermeneutic projects can take up. For example, Lecercle argues, “[T]here is something comforting […] in Carroll’s provocative trick,” referring to the raven riddle[[91]](#footnote-91); the riddle is “comforting” and “safe,” so long as “there is something meant beneath this apparent piece of nonsense.”[[92]](#footnote-92) In other words, there must be some possibility for the reader to produce recognizable meaning underneath nonsense; however, “the Hatter, being mad, may not be in control.”[[93]](#footnote-93) Lecercle terms this lack of control over one’s meaning “the ultimate non-sense of madness, which literary nonsense attempts to deny.”[[94]](#footnote-94) Lecercle thus equates madness with a fundamental lack of meaning, ability to produce meaning, and, ultimately, an unbearable lack of sense. The subsequent removal of madness from the conversation on literary nonsense is necessary to preserve nonsense as a genre, method of articulation, and hermeneutic strategy with a clear, recognizable logic. In this way, Lecercle eliminates what madness induces: a disruption to the established and dichotomous binary apparently required to access nonsense, and the phenomena’s shared ability to multiply meaning.

Similarly, Elizabeth Sewell, another canonical theorist of nonsense, follows Lecercle’s logic in structuring nonsense into a binary but within the context of games and play in her reading of *Alice’s Adventures* in her text, *The Field of Nonsense*. Sewell follows Lecercle’s argument that nonsense manifests as a “contradiction, […] the breaking of the rules of the game.”[[95]](#footnote-95) Sewell takes a different cognitive turn in this analysis of nonsense, noting that this element is often considered in relation to “collections of words,” because “language is one of the mind’s principal instruments for making sense of things and events.”[[96]](#footnote-96) In order to prove this point, Sewell sets up a dualist dialectic of order/disorder “in the mind” as “the defining characteristic of the game of Nonsense.”[[97]](#footnote-97) Within this binary, disorder functions on two levels: Sewell notes that “disorder” is used to “mean […] that of […] madness,”[[98]](#footnote-98) and, to a lesser yet “necessary degree,” incongruity.[[99]](#footnote-99) The former configuration of disorder is a kind of ‘ultimate disorder’ “typical not only of magic, but of dream as well, with its extension into nightmare and *delusion*,”[[100]](#footnote-100) which “would disrupt Nonsense because it allows the notions of substitutions and co-existences.”[[101]](#footnote-101) The latter form of disorder within which Sewell understands nonsense and its functions “is not disorder so much as a condition necessary for the playing of a game.”[[102]](#footnote-102) The literary nonsense that Sewell outlines within her binary, then, falls closer to a recognizable and sensical logic than madness, nightmare, and their capacious logics; there is a slight bend to nonsense, but not enough for nonsense to fall into “lunacy”[[103]](#footnote-103):

[W]hen we turn to nightmare and try to formulate the nature of the mind’s operation under the influence of disorder, we are at once in difficulties, for we have no proper instrument for this side of the investigation. Nightmare, and to a lesser extent dream, are the opposite of logic, but the mind can only think logically if it is to think consciously and rationally at all.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Here, logic is configured as a tool of the “conscious[s] and rationa[l]” mind, clearly equating and prioritizing consciousness and rationality; if the mind is “under the influence of disorder,”[[105]](#footnote-105) it cannot think consciously or rationally, and therefore cannot deploy nonsense. Madness is thus framed as an abject, pathologized element in the assumption of order and disorder as mutually exclusive concepts in nonsense, and in doing so, Sewell ensures that madness, or, in other terms, “the force towards disorder in the mind” is “inhibited”[[106]](#footnote-106) from disrupting her theorizations. Like Lecercle’s dialectic of excess/lack of sense, Sewell’s argument that nonsense follows a dualist logic of order and disorder of meaning represses madness to prioritize cognitive order and reasonability. Sewell draws upon Carroll’s use of number series to prove this point. She suggests, “Nonsense employs series” in a way that “preserv[es] the conditions necessary for serial order, and the integrity of the units and an arrangement turning upon some form of ‘before’ and ‘after,’”[[107]](#footnote-107) the purpose of which is to offer “the mind that sense of security and of being in control”[[108]](#footnote-108) even when words are bent slightly out of hegemonically sensical and meaningful shape. Sewell thus constructs a dualist logic around nonsense that devalues madness as a magical, disruptive element while “carefully limit[ing]”[[109]](#footnote-109) nonsense to its prescribed role as a literary genre.

## **Nonsense: Surfaces and Depths**

The devaluing of madness as magical or otherwise incapable of facilitating consciousness in its all-consuming disordering of things in themselves allows for deployment of nonsense in safe and controlled ways, but what happens when we value madness in this conversation, or push it farther into the foreground? What occurs when we abandon aforementioned dualist logics used to structure nonsense? In his seminal text on the subject, *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze asserts that it is inherently problematic to assume a binaric logic to limit nonsense and sense “into singulars and individuals.”[[110]](#footnote-110) In fact, he suggests, “Sense is […] inseparable from a new kind of parado[x] which mark[s] the presence of nonsense within sense” (70). Deleuze believes that the paradoxical nature of nonsense and sense, and their lack of limitations as coextensive phenomena, is a logic that functions alongside madness and prevents the structuralization of the former elements into singularities. In comparison to the aforementioned theorists of nonsense, Deleuze does not construct the logic of his argument through dualism. Rather, he suggests that nonsense, sense, and madness all exist together in a state of constant flows and effectual relations:

When we assume that nonsense says its own sense, we wish to indicate […] that sense and nonsense have a specific relation which can not copy that of true and false, that is, which can not be conceived simply on the basis of a relation of exclusion. […] [W]hat would be the purpose of rising from the domain of truth to the domain of sense, if it were only to find between sense and nonsense a relation analogous to that of the true and the false? […] The logic of sense is necessarily determined to posit between sense and nonsense an original type of intrinsic relation, a mode of co-presence.[[111]](#footnote-111)

Although there may be different figures of nonsense and sense that “for[m] the surface organization”[[112]](#footnote-112) of language, there is no exclusionary opposition between and among them. More specifically, Deleuze suggests that the first series of nonsense is incorporated into hegemonic systems of signification as the “empty square circulat[ing] […] to produce sense.”[[113]](#footnote-113) This characterization of nonsense, while sitting “at the surface” of language, interpellates “schizoid fragments” into hermeneutic structures “to organize and display [these] elements which have risen from the depth.”[[114]](#footnote-114) This conceptualization of nonsense and madness as productive and available for usage is featured in most popular literary manifestations of the phenomenon, as evident in *Alice’s Adventures*. Here, nonsense and madness function simultaneously within and through a concomitant, relational, and often playful dynamic with sense upon the surface of riddles and puns. The surface of language in Carroll’s text acts as a threshold that maintains a comfortable distance between the differing types of nonsense. Deleuze notes that, while there may be “crude similarities”[[115]](#footnote-115) between different forms and figures of nonsense, it is ultimately silly to equate nonsensical nursery rhymes, poetic experimentations, and experiences of madness, three manifestations of nonsense that Deleuze terms a “grotesque trinity,” made absurd via their comparison.[[116]](#footnote-116)

This primary figure of nonsense is evident in the prologue to *Alice’s Adventures*, which is a poem commonly referred to as “All in the golden afternoon…” that functions as a “narrative frame”[[117]](#footnote-117) of disruption in ways similar to the prologue of Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*. This poem is widely assumed to depict the origin[[118]](#footnote-118) of *Alice’s Adventures*, with Carroll and the Liddell children forming “the tale of Wonderland”[[119]](#footnote-119) together, but I am hesitant to accept this reading. Certainly, the creative cooperation of the blossoming nonsensical narrative between the narrator and the children is noteworthy, and there are moments throughout the poem that indicate its function as more than an outline of the story’s origin. I use feminist literary critic and trauma theorist Shoshana Felman’s thoughts on the prologue of *The Turn of the Screw* to draw a parallel between the ways in which Carroll’s “All in the golden afternoon…” and Henry James’ novella use frame devices to complicate the spatial and temporal nature of their respective texts. *The Turn of the Screw* features an unknown narrator recounting the governess’s infamous story at a campfire, effectively “fram[ing] the story not only spatially but also temporally: while it takes place long *after* the governess’s story, it also tells of events which had occurred *before* it.”[[120]](#footnote-120) The prologue poem to *Alice’s Adventures* demonstrates a similar toying with temporality that is reminiscent of and hints toward the narrative’s nonsensical logic and mad qualities. In particular, the poem simultaneously occurs after and before the story of Alice: the narrator re-tells the events of the afternoon *after* “the tale is done” and the “merry crew” has “steer[ed]”[[121]](#footnote-121) home, and the poem is notably placed spatially within the book *before* the reader launches into the literal story of *Alice’s Adventures*. In these ways, the existence of *Alice’s Adventures* is literally and actually always due to an “echoing effect”[[122]](#footnote-122); the narrative is always already an echo of the story told on that “golden afternoon,”[[123]](#footnote-123) and thus the origin of the story “constitutes its infinite deferral.”[[124]](#footnote-124) This frame, then, works to “problematiz[e] […] the relationship itself between the inside and the outside of the textual space.”[[125]](#footnote-125) In other words, the prologue poem disrupts the traditional binaric framing of the interior/exterior of a narrative, instead opening the text up so that the exterior of the story is included and informs the interior of the story.[[126]](#footnote-126) In a similar aesthetic vein, Eldritch Priest’s *Boring Formless Nonsense* details the “discursive formation” of music as “art,” which calls for an awareness of its “artifice.”[[127]](#footnote-127) He suggests that, in declaring something is *not* music, we “draw attention to the specific behaviour of the sonic medium while at the same time bring[ing] to mind the relationship that this medium is supposed to have with reality.”[[128]](#footnote-128) Clearly, in the case of “non-music,” the conceptual frame of music presupposes and informs the listening-project, thus complicating the relation between interior/exterior by obscuring the boundaries of said frame. In the case of *Alice’s Adventures*, the story’s exterior leaks into the interior nonsensical elements and mad subjectivities, and thus the prologue works to establish a textual environment that productively allows nonsense and madness to manifest outside of definition and stabilization, once again.

The frame blurs the line between text and reality, sense and nonsense, and meaning and meaninglessness in order to draw focus to the “reader-effect,” defined by Felman as “simultaneously trying to make sense of [the story] and *undergoing* the story.”[[129]](#footnote-129) The reader-effect that *Alice’s Adventures* induces is a notable dynamic indicative of a broader statement that nonsense and madness are meaningful, as evidenced in Alice’s interaction with the Cheshire Cat. Namely, as Alice attempts to ascertain information from the cat’s cyclical directions, it simultaneously self-negates and self-affirms in a paradoxical[[130]](#footnote-130) event of “becoming-unlimited.”[[131]](#footnote-131) The “infinitely divisible event” of “becoming-unlimited” is found throughout the story, in which “[t]he event is coextensive with becoming, and becoming is itself coextensive with language,”[[132]](#footnote-132) as evidenced when Alice states,

“I wish you wouldn’t keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy!”

“All right,” said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.[[133]](#footnote-133)

This microcosmic example of the dynamic that is instigated via the frame poem clearly depicts a leakage between the assumedly mutually exclusive concepts of presence and absence. The Cheshire Cat is a remarkable character beyond its iconic floating grin, as its consistent dis/re-appearance affirms its existence as something that was able to disappear in the first place; the cat’s absence simultaneously affirms its presence. Here, the cat demonstrates its occupation of the surface of language as “[t]he infinitely divisible event,” which “is always *both at once.* It is eternally that which has just happened and that which is about to happen […]. [I]t is *neither the one nor the other*, but rather their common result.”[[134]](#footnote-134) The event of the cat disappearing and reappearing “is coextensive with becoming” both present and absent via an infinite logic of nonsense, “and becoming is itself coextensive with language.”[[135]](#footnote-135) Deleuze offers “the event [a]s sense itself,” produced along the surface of language via the “empty square” of nonsense as a “surface effect, […] a product which spreads out over, or extends itself the length of, the surface; it is strictly co-present to, and coextensive with its own cause.”[[136]](#footnote-136) Indeed, the Cheshire Cat employs words, directions, and a constantly and dynamically occurring state of being that “says [their] own sense and is, for this reason, nonsense”[[137]](#footnote-137) — not because, as Lecercle and Sewell suggest, there is a binaric relation of exclusion predicated upon hermeneutic practices of rationality and consciousness.

These theorists’ respective analyses of nonsense as a form, genre, and style offer insight into the way in which it is mobilized alongside madness and sense in literature. To expand on the hermeneutics of nonsense, I also attend to the phenomenon as a function of judgment. In *Our Aesthetic Categories,* Sianne Ngai deconstructs zaniness as an ineffectual, dramatic, and complex “feeling-based judgmen[t],” as well as an “objective or formal styl[e].”[[138]](#footnote-138) Actions or aesthetics dubbed ‘zany,’ Ngai suggests, deploy form “as activity,” and not as “structure,”[[139]](#footnote-139) turning to Lucille Ball’s conveyor belt antics as an example of the phenomenon. Ngai notes, “The forms that our aesthetic experiences […] revolve around […] are thus shapeless or unstructured.”[[140]](#footnote-140) I argue that nonsense follows a similar grammar of performance to zaniness. Indeed, as outlined in Lecercle and Sewell, nonsense is a style of literary writing, in which it is “the set of objective qualities perceived”[[141]](#footnote-141); however, the nonsensical “[is] not [a] produc[t] of restricted fields”[[142]](#footnote-142) and also stands as a method of “perceiving an object.”[[143]](#footnote-143) As a style and subjective judgment, nonsense is able to reflect “basic human and social competences,”[[144]](#footnote-144) as well as “the larger social arrangements these ways of relating presuppose.”[[145]](#footnote-145) As such, in my first chapter, I use the figure of the Western serial killer to analyze how accepted methods of representing and rationalizing serial murder work to reify hegemonic conceptualizations of signification and sense through deploying nonsense as an affective judgment. Indeed, Western society often represents serial killers as monstrous to condemn their aberrational and non-normative behaviour, as well as “expres[s] the incomprehensibility of murder within the rational Enlightenment social order.”[[146]](#footnote-146) The belief that serial murder is incomprehensible, or lacking in sense, reveals the cultural work of the serial killer as a representation of nonsense and madness following Lecercle’s logic of excess and lack. As a result of this depiction, the serial killer is abjected from general society, yet deployed as a means of producing and reiterating hegemonic affect and sense.

In reading Lynn Crosbie’s *Paul’s Case*, my first chapter considers the popular perception of serial killers as symbolic voids of meaning within Western culture and the ways in which nonsense as an affective judgment are utilized. *Paul’s Case* is a postmodern “critical enterprise” that uses “imaginative investigation” to re-present Paul Bernardo and his crimes as socially constructed *bricolages*, or, as Crosbie defines, “makeshift repair[s] of the event[s]” manufactured with “materials, differently”[[147]](#footnote-147) to find significance based on contextual demand. The 52 poly-authored fictional letters that make up Crosbie’s text comment on the arbitrary imposition of sense and meaning upon the serial killer, as well as the problematics of representation. Using Ahmed’s metaphorical extension of Marx’s economic “logic” to consider affectual signs, as well as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s analysis of the production of cultural monsters, this chapter will reveal the ways in which the serial killer circulates as the Deleuzian empty square, a tool of meaning-making that is co-extensive with social constructions of sense. Ultimately, the labelling of serial killer’s actions as “nonsensical” positions nonsense as an affective judgment used as a productive capitalist tool of paradoxical failure and signification. For example, serial killers are relegated to spaces in society meant to erase and control. Here, solitary confinement for those labelled as “criminally insane,” or, in Bernardo’s case, a “dangerous offender” acts as not only a physical manifestation of failure to assimilate to normative society, but also a dramatization of nonsensical signification. In other words, the nonsensical is positioned as a threat. As Eldritch Priest suggests, “[N]onsense is characterized by a failure to respect the firmity and transcendence of “truth” and/or “meaning” and thereby shows reality to be a plastic and inventive thing.”[[148]](#footnote-148) A language founded and buttressed by rationality, reason, objective meaning, and masculinity thus inarguably work to construct hegemonic Western notions of reality, truth, and interpretation, effectively framing a diametric opposition between sensical society and the nonsensical.

Deleuze characterizes the second series of nonsense as an initially insignificant “threat” of a “formless, fathomless nonsense” that, when approached, “overturn[s]” the “organization of the surface” for a “terrible, primordial order.”[[149]](#footnote-149) This series is where Deleuze locates “an irreversible madness”[[150]](#footnote-150) that forces us to engage with “a *language in depth*” that is “carved into […] bodies.”[[151]](#footnote-151) Unlike the “always mobile nonsense” and its “harmless schizoid fragments” that work to “distribut[e] sense”[[152]](#footnote-152) along the surface of language, the second series of nonsense disrupts the surface organization, working as a “subterranean principle” that “erase[s], divert[s], and alienate[s]”[[153]](#footnote-153) sense; however, it is important to note that, “beneath the erasure […], we are summoned to rediscover and to restore meaning.”[[154]](#footnote-154) Thus, rather than containing the nonsensical to a literary genre constructed upon rational and reasonable binaries of sense and signification, the second figure of nonsense invites readers to “reviv[e] the memory of signs by drawing them out of their signifying neutrality.”[[155]](#footnote-155)

Chris Weedon, in her excellent and extensive text, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* outlines how language is a gendered “site of a struggle over meaning.”[[156]](#footnote-156) To prove this point, Weedon outlines the tenants of *écriture féminine*, a French feminist literary movement that is genealogically linked to poststructuralist feminism, and critiques the “align[ment of] rationality with the masculine and sees the feminine in forms and aspects of language marginalized or suppressed by rationalism: poetic language and the languages of mysticism, madness and magic.”[[157]](#footnote-157) The madness associated with the embodied “language in depth” “loads [signs] with affects, and this results in making them ambiguous […] or sometimes nonsensical.”[[158]](#footnote-158) Indeed, this “language in depth” is, in fact, a feminized language in which signs are full of affective and rebellious potential for mad feminine subjects.

Madness and femininity are distinctly interwoven within Western culture, and mad feminine subjects are disproportionately relegated to this “subterranean” figure of nonsense. In fact, “hysteria [was] thought to be a characteristic of feminine lives.”[[159]](#footnote-159) As an example, I turn to the work of Nérée St. Amand and Eugène LeBlanc, two mad theorists who explored the experiences of three mad women who were imprisoned at different Canadian asylums during the Romantic period. The particular case of Mary Huestis Pengilly is remarkable, as her reasonable protest against her institutionalization fully depicts the ways in which insanity and hysteria are deeply tied to femininity. As Pengilly confessed in her secret diary, she was committed to the asylum by her sons, where she eventually learnt to “cheat” the nurses for the “comfort of [the] ward”[[160]](#footnote-160) without the nurses realizing. One of the asylum’s “code[s] of survival,” the authors note, was to “conform outwardly but manipulate when possible or necessary.”[[161]](#footnote-161) In other words, the women kept in this medical institution were performing a version of femininity that was indistinguishable from madness. LeBlanc and St. Amand offer a reading of madness as a “metaphorical expressio[n] of real suffering and as [a] strateg[y] to ensure the survival of a self under threat” from “an essentially misogynistic and oppressive society.”[[162]](#footnote-162) Madness is, in this way, both a “strategy of survival,” as well as an “instrumen[t] of social control for people who violated norms of conduct,”[[163]](#footnote-163) which took the form of the “privileged […] male form of rationality.”[[164]](#footnote-164) The enforcement of normative conduct played out disproportionately more across women’s bodies, especially because feminine subjects are always already set up to fail in discourses of Western reasonability: the emotional side of the soul, configured as the more feminine side of the soul in the foundational philosophy of Plato’s *Republic*,[[165]](#footnote-165) was considered “inferior,”[[166]](#footnote-166) irrational, and, therefore, when displayed, reason enough to institutionalize, medicate, and even lobotomize. Indeed, “the very constitution of sanity and “mental illness” in late 20th-century society was anchored in the bedrock of male normativity.”[[167]](#footnote-167) As such, hysteria “enter[ed] the domain of unreason,”[[168]](#footnote-168) where it became “weighed down” with moral claims and “the natural punishment of a moral wrong.”[[169]](#footnote-169) In other words, feminine madness was socially aligned with immorality.

This dynamic continues into the modern day, as evidenced in Jijian Voronka’s analysis of tabloid magazines that painstakingly detailed Britney Spears’ 2007 madness. Throughout Voronka’s article, she notes how Spears failed to conform to post-feminist norms of conduct within the societal scope of post-welfare citizenship, defined by Laurie Ouellette and James Hay as “the re-privatized arrangements, political reasoning, and individualized responsibilities demanded by the reinvention of government in the United States, but […] also […] welfare in a broader sense, as a mutating but nonetheless integral component of liberal rule.”[[170]](#footnote-170) Voronka notes, “The failure for [Spears] to reshape her body into pre-pregnancy form in the months following her second birth,”[[171]](#footnote-171) as well as moral assumptions about “her unmanaged sexuality, the sullying of her good Southern femininity, her inability to mother, […] [h]er inability (or refusal) to discipline herself,” offered fuel for the press to represent her as “a leaky, unclean, disruptive mess.”[[172]](#footnote-172) This representation is directly due to Spears’ “inability (or refusal)” to follow post-feminist celebrity codes of conduct, and this failure to do so was portrayed as immoral. For example, Spears did not work adequately enough to lose her baby weight and attain a “sexy body,” which, as Rosalind Gill outlines in her taxonomy of postfeminist elements, “Postfeminist media culture: elements of a sensibility,” “is […] women’s key […] source of identity,”[[173]](#footnote-173) and, indeed, value. Thus, Spears lost her identity to madness, becoming a symbol of the Foucauldian fear of nothingness that so deeply and historically informs Western conceptualizations of madness; Spears did not “construct [herself] as [an] active, desiring sexual subjec[t]”[[174]](#footnote-174) that “closely resembl[es] the heterosexual male fantasy.”[[175]](#footnote-175) Instead, she gained weight, shaved her head, and partied.

The tabloid representations of Spears at this time are problematic, not only because they depict “madness [as] always an undesirable state that is due to disease and interferes with representations of our true self,” but also because they act as tools for governing a population that are ideologically aligned with neoliberal capitalism and work to reify the feminization of madness. As Voronka notes, these tabloid magazines featured psychiatrists diagnosing Spears, and thus “psychiatry […] found a new source, through the body of Britney, to translate, disperse and solidify biomedical understandings of madness.”[[176]](#footnote-176) This securing of psychiatry in the Western cultural imaginary as immoral and feminine “works to problematize almost any [feminine] behaviour into the realm of psychiatric illness.”[[177]](#footnote-177) Spears’ narrative of descent to recovery thus acts as a neoliberal post-feminist model of redemption that depicts “a comeback, coming back from [the] descent into the deviation from the norm.”[[178]](#footnote-178)

As examples of the “subterranean” second figure of Deleuzian nonsense and the moralizing discursive structures that are imposed upon mad feminine bodies, I turn to Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Emma Donoghue’s *The Wonder*. These two texts explore the deep, multi-layered embodiment of feminine madness and its language, which “appear[s] […] as heavily, violently arbitrary.”[[179]](#footnote-179) *Surfacing* follows the story of the unnamed narrator, who returns to her childhood home in rural Quebec to search for her missing father. With special attention paid to the embodied and affective language of madness, the narrative of *Surfacing* explores the transfiguration of the oppressed narrator as she searches for language outside of the rational, masculine articulations that her travel companions impose upon her. Ultimately, the narrator evolves into a *loup-garou*, coming to embody the struggle over meaning she is interpellated into, as well as the subterranean dive into the nonsensical. In comparison, *The Wonder* tells the story of a nun who studied under Florence Nightingale sent to a remote Irish village to investigate a young girl rumoured to survive solely off manna from heaven. This character, Anna, is a fictional rendering of the ‘miraculous maids’ or ‘fasting girls’ that piqued public interest in the 16th and 17th centuries. As feminist medical historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg writes, there were “scores of young women, most often in young adulthood, [who] undertook fasts that were extolled in vernacular folk literature as proof of divine providence.”[[180]](#footnote-180) Brumberg points out that these fasting girls rose to prominence at a time when secularization and the medicalization of extraordinary behaviours were taking hold, and thus “physicians interpreted their [the fasting girls’] voluntary emaciation” as a “simple fraud, and, therefore, an affront to science,” diagnosing these girls with “girlhood hysteria.”[[181]](#footnote-181) Remarkably, this statement points to the ways in which Anna’s articulation of trauma through embodiment — or, perhaps, the attempt to eradicate the body — becomes caught up in societal anxieties over girlhood bodies, purity, and virtue. These qualities come to bear on Anna’s emaciated body, effectively determining her as weak, impure, and mad.

## **Responses to Potential Criticisms and Critiques**

I propose using *Paul’s Case, Surfacing,* and *The Wonder* as aesthetic texts in this project not only for content, but also because these “form[s] of cultural production,” as Hannah Dyer suggests in the introduction to her work on queer aesthetics of childhood, “cannot be discontinuous from inner life or social relations”[[182]](#footnote-182); however, I am aware of the potential concern about the accuracy of drawing material conclusions from fictional texts, and vice versa. Consequently, I turn to the introduction of the anthology *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the “Real,”* written by Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol to consider the tensions between ‘legitimately authentic’ testimonies and mere “representations of the “real.””[[183]](#footnote-183) The authors question the “real” as “an uninterrogated site” deployed “to advance particular cultural and political agendas” by “cultural critics and feminists.”[[184]](#footnote-184) They write:

In the U.S. [and, more broadly, Western] academy, debates over the “real” infuse discourses surrounding the “culture wars” and “canon wars.” Conservatives seek to resecure a traditional canon based on a faith that these championed texts transcend politics of even history. Critics of this position, such as feminists, have rightly pointed out how this “transcendent canon” privileges white, western men. Nonetheless, they too often rely on binary assumptions that promote women’s voices as expressions of the authentic experiences of violence, trauma, and resistance.[[185]](#footnote-185)

In other words, Hesford and Kozol point to the ways in which both conservative and feminist academics utilize the concept of a universal, objective “real” in order to judge articulations as authentic. This acquiescence to universalism and objectivity produces a problem with agency. More relevent to this project, feminists in particular “are beginning to question the assumption that the subject can speak only for him- or herself, a stance that ignores how subjects participate in the construction of subject positions”[[186]](#footnote-186); rather than privileging “the material body” as a site for both “the production of reality claims” and identity formation, Hesford and Kozol aim to “locat[e] agency not only in individual subjectivity but also in social structures, cultural politics, and historical relations of power.”[[187]](#footnote-187) As such, the authors posit, “[T]he “real” is not a fixed essence but a historically formulated epistemology”[[188]](#footnote-188) that is “changing and unstable.”[[189]](#footnote-189) Turning away from the dualist logics of realism/abstract and objective truth/representational fiction offers theorists a line of inquiry that balances the importance of “cultural forms *and* material conditions” while maintaining a critique of “how notions of agency and authenticity have been put to use in the name of political and social struggles for identity, authority, and legitimacy.”[[190]](#footnote-190)

This discussion has significant implications for my project, in which I use aesthetic texts to investigate the material and cultural implications of, broadly, trauma, and more specifically, the Western sociopolitical conceptualizations of madness and nonsense. Feminist theorists often reveal their “epistemological dependencies on positivist knowledge claims” while simultaneously attempting to “undermine”[[191]](#footnote-191) them, and particularly in “moments of trauma or crisis.”[[192]](#footnote-192) In these moments, “we seek legitimacy or power in response to that trauma”[[193]](#footnote-193); however, I interpret and utilize literary texts produced by and about women[[194]](#footnote-194) to resist new formations of objectivity and truth while remaining accountable to the material conditions under which these characters function. As such, I attend to the mad body while also recognizing the “historically contingent”[[195]](#footnote-195) traumas that emerge in these aesthetic texts in order to “account for competing subjective realities.”[[196]](#footnote-196) This theoretical enterprise thereby offers an “inhabit[ing] [of] alternative narratives in which the past returns and is remembered for its ability to clarify the psychosocial dynamics of the present.”[[197]](#footnote-197)

Another critique that I would like to take the time to meditate on is Deleuze’s use of the schizophrenic as the centrepiece in his analyses of meaning. In her paper entitled “Figuring Disability,” Kate Kaul outlines how “post-modern writing relies heavily on images of disability (blindness, madness, cyborg bodies) which are often presented as an inability to read the world; at the same time, these images of disability are supposed to clarify; metaphor makes the world readable, comprehensible.”[[198]](#footnote-198) Kaul critiques *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* for “confin[ing] the schizophrenic to metaphor,” effectively “leav[ing] disability in the figurative.”[[199]](#footnote-199) What of the material conditions of the schizophrenic, the mad person? These conditions are immediately done away with, and “the utility of thinking like a schizophrenic, or rather […] of *thinking* you are thinking like a schizophrenic”[[200]](#footnote-200) is prioritized; however, as Kaul notes in referencing Judith Butler’s critique of materiality, “although it is clear that some things are objects and some things are ideas, the act of drawing a line between them is always a political one.”[[201]](#footnote-201) Thus, to draw a line between the lived experience of the schizophrenic and the theoretical use of their assumed psychic conditions is a political act that does not actually access meaning in a significant way. In fact, Kaul notes, “You can’t think them apart then, materiality and signification, or matter and meaning.” Indeed, Kaul quotes Butler’s point that “materiality and signification” are “indissolubl[y]”[[202]](#footnote-202) linked together.

This point has significant implications for madness. Felman notes that, when madness was “released from its physical chains,” the “liberation […] masks a new form of confinement,”[[203]](#footnote-203) in which madness is objectified. Indeed, Felman writes that madness moved from “elud[ing] any objective grasp” to “becom[ing] an object among others.”[[204]](#footnote-204) Thus, madness is “still a prisoner, bound now by the chains of its objectification.”[[205]](#footnote-205) It is always already “forbidden the possibility of appearing in its own right, still prevented from speaking for itself, in a language of its own.”[[206]](#footnote-206)

My use of Deleuze’s theories on sense and nonsense, and the ways in which madness is implicated in said theories, attempts to relocate madness in the material — primarily, in the mad body. As previously noted, when one deploys nonsense as an aesthetic judgment, it effectively flags the “failure of reason, a crisis of subjectivity.”[[207]](#footnote-207) The delegitimization of mad knowledge through judging a mad person as nonsensical is embodied and experienced materially. I also aim to note a feminized mad language in the second Deleuzian figure of nonsense that is embodied, deep, and hermeneutically productive. As such, my dissertation posits nonsense as not only a literary style, but also a facet of mad subjectivity that is located in the body, and felt varyingly across different bodies. Ultimately, my intention of introducing feminist theories and mad studies into Deleuze’s conceptualization of nonsense aims to locate his ideas in the material experiences and consequences of madness in Western society.

Reappropriation, however, has fraught dynamics. As Kalpana Wilson writes in her deconstruction of neoliberal appropriations of feminism, “The appropriation of the ideas which emerge from movements with a transformative agenda and their incorporation into dominant narratives […] is also always a strategy to undermine and defuse critical concepts which challenge the basis of the existing order, and to derail or marginalize resistance which is informed by them.”[[208]](#footnote-208) Indeed, as I mentioned earlier in this introduction (“Against Interpellation and Consumption by the Rational Neoliberal University”), I am concerned about the implications of including madness in my research, as it does involve a level of interpellation into neoliberal capitalist institutions, such as the university. I see the investigation of the intricacies in which madness and nonsense find themselves entangled, as well as the proposal of a hermeneutics of the mad feminine subject as not necessarily constitutive of a practice of reappropriation so much as an opportunity for articulations of madness “to speak” in a more “democratic” language, one that “give[s] access to the largest number”[[209]](#footnote-209) of scholars. However, it is crucial to note Gayatri Spivak’s caveat in her analysis of the politics of translation as a postcolonial scholar. She notes, “Without a sense of the rhetoricity of language, a species of neocolonialist construction of the non-Western scene is afoot.”[[210]](#footnote-210) This “intimacy with the original language”[[211]](#footnote-211) of the text, which takes the form of “[t]he history of the language, the history of the author’s moment, the history of the language-in-and-as-translation, must figure in the weaving as well.”[[212]](#footnote-212) In a similar dynamic, my usage of Deleuze’s theories as a framework for this project helps my considerations of nonsense and madness as an investigative tool into the mechanisms of mad agency. As a scholar firmly grounded in the lived experiences of madness and its material consequences in both private and public spheres, I have “a tough sense of the terrain of the original”[[213]](#footnote-213) and meet “the requirement for intimacy”[[214]](#footnote-214) with textual analyses of madness. I assert this eligibility because, as Derrida writes, “[A]ny speaking subject […] who is trying to evoke madness *inside* of thought […] can only do so in the dimension of *possibility*,”[[215]](#footnote-215) because madness must be excluded as a “general condition and the constitutive foundation of the very enterprise of speech.”[[216]](#footnote-216)

But what of nonsense-speech? For anyone accused of (or judged as) being-mad and speaking nonsense, of which I am chronically labelled, madness is consistently articulated outside of the abstract dimension, in the dimension of the material. Felman suggests, “[L]iterature, fiction, is the only possible meeting-place between madness and philosophy, between delirium and thought.”[[217]](#footnote-217) Felman continues on, attempting to locate the mad subject in arguing, “[T]he position of the subject is not defined by *what* he says, nor by what he talks *about,* but by the place — unknown to him — *from which* he speaks.”[[218]](#footnote-218) I question this positioning of the mad subject “with respect to the delusion,”[[219]](#footnote-219) because it presupposes that “the subject and the theme of madness […] [cannot] become present to each other.”[[220]](#footnote-220) What of the mad subject with one foot planted in the material world, and the other in delusion, a kind of atopic reality? Again, as I have suggested previously, the binaric logic that assumes madness and sanity are diametrically opposed, just like the binary of delusion and reality, is not an immutable structure. Rather, the position of the mad subject always already functions in the liminality between the entirely material and the entirely delusional so that they inform each other. As such, I argue that “the position of the [delusional] subject and the content of his statement” can indeed “coincide.”[[221]](#footnote-221) To assume otherwise is to strip the mad subject of the agential possibility of identity formation, because, as Spivak notes, “language may be one of many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves. […] Making sense of ourselves is what produces identity.”[[222]](#footnote-222) Producing identity through sense is not antithetical to nonsensical modes of being. As I will elaborate, the first series of Deleuzian nonsense is reliant upon sense, and vice versa; to be mad does not mean that you are without an identity. Even if, as Felman and Derrida argue, articulations of madness do not follow hegemonic logics of reason, there is a grammar to nonsense that works to position the phenomenon as a language of madness.

Admittedly, I am hesitant to align my dissertative work with Deleuze while also deploying a feminist mad studies framework because of my multi-faceted anxiety concerning the word ‘theory.’ As Lauren Fournier points out in her fantastic book, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism,* there is a historic foundation of misogyny in the labelling of intellectual work. In particular, “[m]en who are Euro-American, upper class, not racialized, and at least heterosexual-passing tended to be granted the kinds of ‘objective’ authority required for their work to be considered critical and intellectual, while women, people of color, Indigenous people, poor and working-class people, non-university- or college-educated people, and others were objected from that realm because of their assumedly uncritical hypersubjectivity and embodiment [...].”[[223]](#footnote-223) Consequently, oppositions were constructed between what Jeffrey R. Di Leo terms ‘high theory,’ such as deconstruction and structuralism, and ‘low theory,’ like cultural, performance, and postcolonial studies. These oppositions undoubtedly took on and remain to hold gendered implications. Di Leo continues, “The *high* theory of the ‘70s which was coming to acquire a timeless, ahistorical permanence in the 80s [...] was giving way to the *low* theory of cultural studies which re-emphasized the contingent, local, historical, and contextual character of all cultural artifacts.”[[224]](#footnote-224) The 1990s eventually saw a movement away from the term ‘theory’ and towards ‘studies,’ as “[f]orward-looking members of our field now focus their attention on cultural *studies*, not cultural *theory*.”[[225]](#footnote-225) It is within this posttheoretical turn that “cultural studies had broadened to include postcolonial, queer, and media studies, while *theory* was showing only the faintest signs of development.”[[226]](#footnote-226) Thus, according to Di Leo’s approximations, postcolonial, feminist, and queer theories are categorically different than traditional, ‘high’ theory. Instead, they remain within the realm of cultural studies, a form of ‘low theory’ that is highly feminized and devalued.

Di Leo’s article takes up anxieties about the potential relevance of Deleuze’s work waning in this “posttheoretical”[[227]](#footnote-227) academic environment, and I understand that bringing Deleuze into a dissertation situated primarily in feminist and disability thinking, a realm of ‘low theory’ that is consistently devalued, is odd. I do believe that Di Leo is correct in stating that “Deleuze’s writings always seemed to have a less comfortable relationship with theory,” and the ever-evolving nature of his work may be “more accurately captured by the term ‘studies.’”[[228]](#footnote-228) While the work of Deleuze may be considered ‘high theory,’ I argue that the lack of his “theoretical completeness,”[[229]](#footnote-229) as well as his discomfort with theory, are helpful lines of inquiry into ‘low theory’ practices and knowledges that are centred on embodiment and subjectivity, such as autotheory. While I will expand on the potentiality of autotheory as a hermeneutic practice in my second chapter, I want to signal that using Deleuze’s thoughts on nonsense and madness is not antithetical to the feminist autotheoretical imperative. Rather, it is a fruitful textual body through which thoughts and embodied experiences of feminized disability can be articulated.

Finally, aligning my aesthetic analyses with a poststructural feminist and mad studies framework requires a contradictory debt and resistance to psychoanalytic theory, a methodological tightrope that produces a necessary apprehension of the complexity mad bodies, and particularly feminine bodies, experience. Indeed, as the narrator in *Surfacing* and the young girl in *The Wonder* are both configured as hysterically mad, it is worth exploring the ways in which psychoanalysis acts as both a radical yet restrictive field within feminist and mad studies. While psychoanalysis has some problematic facets, it is important for feminism because it challenges discourses that otherwise “assume the unified, self-present subject of rationality.”[[230]](#footnote-230) In particular, I find the structural and poststructural feminist responses to psychoanalysis helpful, as they also lend well to avenues of inquiry for mad studies. For example, Luce Irigaray’s reworking of psychoanalysis attends to the issue of the phallocentric “organizing principle of the symbolic order,” which assumes “[m]ale sexuality and desire […] [is] the source of the type of rational language through which social power is exercised.”[[231]](#footnote-231) While this critique is important, Irigaray’s theory accepts sexuality as the basis for women’s language, effectively reducing women to their sexuality. Hélène Cixous, in comparison, applies Derrida’s concepts of phallo- and logocentrism to men’s language and sexuality, arguing that these masculine features attempt to “fix meaning through a set of binary oppositions […] which rely for their meaning on a primary binary opposition of male/female.”[[232]](#footnote-232) Introducing Deleuzian interpretations of nonsense into my theoretical equation not only honours the lineage of the feminist critiques of psychoanalysis, but also removes dualist logics and suggests that meaning is fluid and unstable rather than tied to a binary of gender and sexuality, because “[c]ommon sense” is “important” and “constitutive” to “maintaining the centrality of gender difference as a focus of power in society.”[[233]](#footnote-233) To retheorize the production and function of sense as interwoven with nonsense, then, also rejects the foundational Western “understanding of subjectivity” as “rational,” “unified,” and “non-contradictory,” and “guaranteed by common sense.”[[234]](#footnote-234) Consequently, I posit that the rational, unified subject is not guaranteed by sense, and the aforementioned feminist critiques that elaborate upon psychoanalysis help explain the theoretical position of the mad body within my work.

## **On/ward**

In sum, this project explores two intimately connected phenomena: madness and nonsense. I identify the social conceptualizations of each, and provide a critical taxonomy of specific iterations of the phenomena both separately and together. My framework is interdisciplinary, drawing on poststructuralist feminist theory, affect theory, and hermeneutics, three fields that have held my interest since the birth of this project in my undergraduate honour’s thesis. This work interrogated how nonsense is used as a lyrical style in rap music to articulate Black[[235]](#footnote-235) men’s anger, particularly focusing on rap artists Tyler, the Creator, and Death Grips. At the time, I was taken with questioning who held the privilege to produce meaning, especially because I was unknowingly falling into what would be a years-long episode of mental illness with brief highs and deep lows. I constantly felt unable to effectively translate my pain, confusion, and other affectual responses to this episode, and many of the masculine medical professionals that I saw during this time acted as gatekeepers of meaning-making, always already assuming that I was incapable of producing significance. As I came to understand through both my theoretical research and my personal experiences, it is a privilege to produce knowledge and meaning; it is a privilege to integrate oneself into structures of reason and sensibility. Many mental health professionals reinforced the fact that I did not have those privileges.

My Master’s thesis introduced madness into the project’s fold. Inspired by my own experiences in and out of therapy, psych wards, psychiatrists’ offices, and pharmacies, I found myself internalizing the routine delegitimization of meaning that I produced from my experiences with mental illness. Foolishly, I thought that writing an academic piece on madness and the ways in which my articulations of mental illness are perceived as nonsense would make others take me seriously as a knowledge producer. But what does it mean to be ‘taken seriously’ when I find myself constantly represented as the fool?

Now, as I write this dissertation, I recognize the roots of this thinking, the naïve yet acute desire to be told that my thoughts and feelings are significant by hegemonic sensical society. Even if my entire being is shaped by madness, I want to *matter*. This dissertation has helped me come to understand that, as our vast understandings of meaning grows, the potentiality of language, interpretation, and, thus, identity grows alongside it. I want to be a part of that conversation, because I have a unique and significant positionality that unveils a method of meaning-making and interpretation otherwise shrouded in darkness sedimented over centuries. This potentially infinite dialectical relationship between language and interpretation provides me with hope that I will one day be identified as a knowledge producer. Until then, I identify myself as such, and insist on my spot in this philosophical conversation.

# **Chapter One: The Haunting Il/logic of Serial Killers**

My fascination with serial killers began in my childhood.

I broke my first bone when I was nine in a skating contest, fearlessly challenging boys in community hockey leagues to a race from one side of the arena to the other, *and winning*. Unfortunately, in one race, I miscalculated my skate’s positioning, and pushed too far on my right toe, resulting in me keeling over, breaking my left wrist, and losing the race.

I don’t remember many of the broken bones between my first and my fourth, because they were mostly a result of my clumsiness and an as-of-yet still ‘officially’ undiagnosed bone condition.[[236]](#footnote-236) My fourth broken bone occurred when I was eleven, and was a remarkable experience that has remained with me throughout my life: in our beginner karate class, a boy that I knew from school snapped my wrist while we were paired up to learn a self-defense move. The worst part is that dojos are almost completely mirrored, and so I saw his face laughing as I asked, snarled, and eventually yelled at him to stop. The class stopped, the sensei came over, and I was ushered out of the dojo. In a week, that boy came to my parents’ doorstep and apologized to my parents and I as his mother gripped his shoulder, looming over him. I remember the way the doorway framed their bodies. I remember my mother’s unimpressed face. I remember the embarrassment, anger, fear, and, most of all, pain. I had always been a roughhouser and tomboy, finding more interest in boys’ prescribed gendered roles, forms of play, and clothing. While I believed I was equal, I was eventually reminded that I could not occupy that position.

I share these stories of childhood because they are necessary when disclosing my considerably morbid interest in true crime, which is experiencing a renaissance amongst white feminine people, in particular. While I appreciate that this true crime culture caters to my niche interests, the overwhelmingly white perspective is distracting. This centring of white perspectives in discussions on policing, incarceration, and corporal punishment results in a marked lack of critical analysis of the racist, colonial, and ableist dimensions to this trend. In other words, because “[w]hiteness is what allows for such oblivious neutrality,” and whiteness “is the premise of blankness, the presumption of the universal,”[[237]](#footnote-237) problematic beliefs about criminality without consideration of the intersectional dimensions that found and perpetuate this concept are riddled throughout the true crime community. As Andrea DenHoed points out in a critical essay on *My Favorite Murder,* a comedy/true crime podcast, this renewal of the true crime genre still falls upon stories that “lean on the premise that if the science could be improved, the resources spent, or the bad actors weeded out, the system would work, truth would be known, and justice would be served.”[[238]](#footnote-238) This is, simply, not the truth. While I consciously use “crime stories, true or otherwise,” as a way of “self-soothing” and giving myself “reassurance that [I] live in a stable, knowable world,” I recognize that these perspectives can, as DenHoed writes, “fee[d] into a recklessly limited worldview.”[[239]](#footnote-239) In fact, DenHoed writes, “under the guise of serious truth-telling and justice-seeking,” the recent influx of podcasts and documentaries work to fulfil a “voyeuristic” desire in audiences.[[240]](#footnote-240) What of the victims and survivors of abuse, gendered violence, and, as is most often the case in crimes involving feminine people, sexual assault?

Ultimately, I would be lying if I said that the repeated experience of abuse does not desensitize you to it in some way. When I listen to true crime podcasts and watch documentaries about horrible things that happen to women and feminine people, I am reminded of the flawed justice of the apology at my parents’ front door. I am reminded of how I suffered at the hands of my first boyfriend, a cruel boy who taught me that bruises and broken ribs meant love. Sometimes, as I listen to a story about Ted Bundy wearing a cast and sling to trick undergraduate women into helping him with his groceries, I catch myself thinking, “Of course that happened — and I would expect nothing less.” Perhaps I am incredibly jaded, but perhaps “trauma’s symptoms cause its subject to enact an unfinished event; the subject has survived the event but has difficulty making meaning from it.”[[241]](#footnote-241) Perhaps my own personal experiences with gendered violence and feminine loss have and continue to attune me to the reality of Western culture: under white supremacist, patriarchal neoliberal capitalism, many feminine bodies and subjectivities become consigned to loss, grief, and suffering.

I began to recognize this as my reality as a preteen, when I was often consigned to the couch in order to rest and ice a broken bone, and where I read *Maclean’s* or *Time Magazine* articles that detailed another group of grisly murders committed by a serial killer. I struggled to make sense of the guilty man’s actions. Even with the sordid details neatly laid out in an article with infographics in the last third of the magazine, the journalist inevitably left the reader with more questions than answers. How can we make sense of the serial killer’s crimes? Do we owe the victims some sort of meaning? Do rationalizations even matter, at this point?[[242]](#footnote-242)

I was raised by parents who were born in the mid-century, now colloquially referred to as the “Golden Age of Serial Killing” among true crime aficionados. This label comes from, as Eric W. Hickey notes, the dramatic increase in the identification of serial killers between 1950 and 1995,[[243]](#footnote-243) with the marked “rate of increase experienced during the 1970s and 1980s”[[244]](#footnote-244) when analyzing data from 1800-1995. Furthermore, during the 70s and 80s, public media grew in popularity and technological accessibility, and so “media attention [was] instrumental in creating public awareness of the serial murderer.”[[245]](#footnote-245) Although Hickey analyzes data exclusive to the United States, American media significantly shapes the Canadian public as well as its press, offering a template for reporting Canadian serial murderers. Indeed, “the incidence and public awareness of serial murder grew through the 1980s, [and] so did the sense of fear and panic”[[246]](#footnote-246) that captured the Western world. As a result, I was often surrounded by entirely uncritical and awestruck reporting of the pursuit and capture of serial killers. As I learned to walk, my parents watched one of Canada’s most famous serial killers, Paul Bernardo, publicly defend himself against the prosecution and his wife, Karla Homolka, during his trial. In elementary school, I curled up into a couch with an edition of *Maclean’s*, read past the content warning, and learnt all about Robert Pickton, the British Columbia pig farmer who preyed on Indigenous women and sex workers. Drawn to the eyes of these men in their pictures, I would gaze at their photographs, fruitlessly searching for meaning and reason in these crimes. At the time in which I’m writing this dissertation, I religiously listen to one of my favourite podcasts, *My Favorite Murder*, twice a week, and I almost exclusively watch true crime documentaries. Sometimes, I find myself pausing the documentary once they show the serial killer’s mugshot. I stare directly into his eyes, allowing them to occupy the pixels on my television screen for a brief moment, lingering before I snap out of it and hit play. Why do we always experience a “nagging fear that there is something behind [the killer’s gaze] that must not be apprehended let alone rationalised”[[247]](#footnote-247)? And what do we fear is hidden in the murderer’s eyes?

For ease of discussion, I follow the typical definitions of the Western serial killer within both sociology and criminology, as well as cultural and celebrity studies. The former defines the serial murderer as someone who has committed three or more murders. The latter defines him[[248]](#footnote-248) as a social figure configured as an abject monster, deployed to delineate and reinforce thresholds of sense, reason, and meaning. In *Natural Born Celebrities,* David Schmid analyzes the serial killer as a “figure who represents the American [or, in the scope of my dissertation, Western] public’s attempt to embody the seemingly omnipresent and anonymous threat of violent crime.”[[249]](#footnote-249) The fear that founds this “threat” fosters “comparisons of serial killers to a host of gothic monsters,”[[250]](#footnote-250) because, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests, despite the monster’s ejection from from reasonable society, the monster actually “originate[s] Within”[[251]](#footnote-251) society and problematizes notions of imagined community.[[252]](#footnote-252) As Schmid writes, “[A] large part of the appeal of the rhetoric of gothic monstrosity is that it enables us to express, in Karen Halttunen’s words, “the incomprehensibility of murder within the rational Enlightenment social order.””[[253]](#footnote-253) Indeed, “carefully — rationally, in fact — assign[ing] blame for our crimes to the irrational impulse”[[254]](#footnote-254) and materializing this assignation via gothic metaphors prevents the serial killer from threatening or penetrating the delicate foundations of rationality in Canadian society.

I suggest that the serial killer’s status as “externally incoherent” and senseless makes him an excellent figure through which to explore theories on nonsense. He takes up the Deleuzian “empty square,” defined as a nonsensical element drifting upon the surface of society. To investigate the serial killer as such illuminates the ways in which nonsense is deployed as an aesthetic judgment, which then works to reinforce hermeneutic and ontological boundaries of normality within the late-capitalist economy of “the traumatic.” Thus, within the first section of this chapter (The Western Serial Killer as Social Figure), I outline the history of reasonability in Western society, a foundation from which I will consider the social configuration and depictions of the serial killer alongside Deleuze’s first figure of nonsense and Western conceptualizations of madness. In this section, I also note the ways in which representations of the serial killer align with and differ from Deleuzian nonsense. The second section (The Nonsensically Mad as Aesthetic Judgment) then places Sianne Ngai’s analyses of aesthetic categories in conversation with the first Deleuzian figure of nonsense to theorize nonsense as a flexible aesthetic judgment productively used within sanist epistemes, exemplified through representations of the serial killer that produce him as a frightening and threatening nonsensically mad criminal committing ‘senseless’ crimes. The third section (Affective Economies and Dis/ease) expands upon the affective implications of this aesthetic within Sara Ahmed’s economic logic of affect. In this section, I particularly attend to revelations about the abjection of a normative body that are drawn from Bernardo’s affective positioning. Furthermore, I implicate the societal structures that prioritize whiteness and misogyny, and effectively allow serial murder to take place. The fourth section (Hermeneutic Execution) unpacks the space of the solitary confinement cell as a physical manifestation of irrationality, and meditates on the overlap of trauma, madness, and gothic nonsense within aesthetic judgments and representations of the serial killer.

## **The Western Serial Killer as Social Figure**

In *The Logic of Sense,* Gilles Deleuze argues against structuring nonsense and sense into a logic of “singulars and individuals.”[[255]](#footnote-255) Instead, he outlines two figures of nonsense, of which the first figure is of primary interest to this chapter. This first figure of nonsense follows a circulating path upon the surface of language:

[E]ach term has sense only by virtue of its position relative to every other term. But this relative position itself depends on the absolute position of each term relative to the instance = x. The latter is determined as nonsense and circulates endlessly throughout the series [of terms]. Sense is actually *produced by* this circulation as sense which affects both the signifier and the signified. In short, sense is always an *effect*.[[256]](#footnote-256)

Interacting with language as an “empty square,” this first figure of Deleuzian nonsense produces sense as a “surface effect” by drifting upon the surfaces of series between two poles of seemingly oppositional elements. As an example, I turn to an excerpt from Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist text, *Nausea*, which describes Antoine Roquentin’s emotional intensity when surveying an empty city square. This excerpt effectively details the angst Roquentin experiences at the prospect of living a meaningless life, configured as an affective response to nonsense:

Nothing has changed and yet everything is different. I can’t describe it; it’s like the Nausea and yet it’s just the opposite: at last an adventure happens to me and when I question myself I see that it happens *that I am myself and that I am here;* *I* am the one who splits the night, I am as happy as the hero of a novel. […]

I stop for a moment, I wait, I feel my heart beating; my eyes search the empty square. I see nothing. A fairly strong wind has risen. I am mistaken. […]

From the far end of the café something returns which helps to link the scattered moments of that Sunday and solder them together and which gives them a meaning.[[257]](#footnote-257)

In this excerpt, there is a productive tension between happiness and misery. These two affects act as poles unrestricted by the dualist logic of mutual exclusion, instead functioning within an infinite dialectical relation. Indeed, in this passage, happiness and misery generate a fruitful pressure in which the sense at work includes happiness *and* sadness, and one cannot exist without the other. Sense, in this respect, “spreads out over, or extends itself the length of, the surface” of the city square, less in a spatialized manner, but more so affectively. This theoretical move allows Deleuze to assert sense’s “co-presen[ce] to, and coextensi[on] with, its own cause.”[[258]](#footnote-258) Thus, in the passage from *Nausea*, the nonsensical element N is *both* happiness A and, incoherently, misery B, which then works to produce the coextensive sense S. In this way, Deleuze avoids an oppositional relationship in his broader theorizations on nonsense. In essence, Deleuze avoids the theoretical trap of dualist logics, which have otherwise dictated that nonsense and sense function within a grammar of excess and lack, or meaning and nothingness. Rather, a logic of relationality replaces dualism, in which “there is no structure without the empty square,” or the nonsensical element, “which makes everything function”[[259]](#footnote-259) and produces otherwise incoherent significance in Western hermeneutic structures. Deleuze’s conceptualization of nonsense and sense does not restrict the hermeneutic and affective significance that these elements produce together, instead theorizing the phenomenon as a method of articulating otherwise inarticulable affective intensity, which Brian Massumi terms the “too much of a situation.”[[260]](#footnote-260)

This dynamic of the nonsensical acts very differently from the well-established rational philosophical and ethical system of Western society. As John Ralston Saul writes in his analysis of how reason came to stand as the governing sociopolitical structure, “The reality is that we have not moved beyond the basic ideas of the sixteenth century which, for want of any better description, should be called the concepts of reason. This Age of Reason will soon have been with us for 5000 years.”[[261]](#footnote-261) In other words, the base values of the Enlightenment still rule with an iron fist in the contemporary time period at the expense of other “recognized human characteristics — spirit, appetite, faith and emotion, but also intuition, will and, most important, experience.”[[262]](#footnote-262) These facets of humanity are still devalued, attributed to “the treacherous ground of our baser instinct,”[[263]](#footnote-263) and “deni[ed]”[[264]](#footnote-264) in favour of reason. Consequently, reason has continued to accrue more sociopolitical value over time at the cost of other qualities. Reason remains so seductive in the modern day, Saul suggests, because of the belief that it “appl[ies] a kind of clean, unemotional logic to every decision.”[[265]](#footnote-265) The usage of “clean logic” unrestrained by emotion is then considered “the sign of Western man’s conscious self and therefore of his better self.”[[266]](#footnote-266) Thus, reason is equated to “common sense morality,”[[267]](#footnote-267) and continues as “a self-justifying system which generates its own logic”[[268]](#footnote-268) via discourses of morality and diversion of criticisms; Saul points out that any criticism of the intensely reasonable systems put in place is “caught up immediately in the structures of the official arguments which accompany the official modern ideologies” rendering any critiques of rationality ineffectual, and absorbing them into the very system itself. This self-perpetuating structure, however, demonstrates “signs of failure,” such as the current economic system, “but the system provides no vocabulary for describing this breakdown, unless we become irrational; and the vocabulary of unreason is that of darkness, so we quite properly avoid it”[[269]](#footnote-269) and remain married to the Western empire of reason.

This history of reason’s unfettered supremacy in the contemporary period clearly demonstrates how any perceived lack of reason has become weighted down by immorality. Thus, the irrational and unreasonable are burdened with moralizing discourses that are imposed upon agents deemed “crazy” and “evil,”[[270]](#footnote-270) who are then judged as nonsensically mad. As a brief example, Saul turns to the Holocaust, and points out that Adolf Hitler’s death camps were “the result of a perfectly rational argument — given what reason had become — that was self-justifying and hermetically sealed.”[[271]](#footnote-271) Although historical narratives have “placed the establishment, staffing and running of death camps in the category of a lunatic act,” this event was “carried out in a rational manner” as “[a]n act of pure logic”[[272]](#footnote-272) that perpetuated it further. I argue that this brief history of reason’s supremacy in the West provides insight into serial killers’ actions, as they too demonstrate a self-perpetuating logic that is carried out in an exceedingly rational way; however, in order to preserve the sanctity of reason and rationality, these murderers are relegated to the realm of the nonsensically mad. Despite hegemonic society’s constant denial of significance produced in this realm, the serial killer does produce meaning via a hermeneutics of nonsense.

This chapter uses Paul Bernardo as an example of this history of reason’s supremacy, as well as its socioaffectual consequences. Bernardo, a Canadian serial killer, is a social figure drifting upon the surface of society in the same fashion as the empty circulating square of nonsense that works to produce sense and significance in Canadian society. Bernardo also stands as a singularity, a gargantuan event in Canada that divided the country’s ideologies on the media’s role in publicizing the trials of heinous criminals; the ‘reasonable’ Canadian news visibly worked to make sense of Bernardo while also constructing him as inhuman, an unreasonable monster outside of nationalist values. Indeed, the news fell into “pure sensationalism and horror”[[273]](#footnote-273) before a publication ban was placed on Bernardo’s trial to avoid any profit rendered from his crimes and image. Before this ban, though, the media portrayed Bernardo as “cold-blooded, senseless.”[[274]](#footnote-274) Although perhaps not the media’s intention, representing Bernardo as a “senseless” monster ultimately works to not only reinforce the perceived cruciality of reason, but also equate nonsense and madness with immorality, danger, and fear.

Bernardo thus offers a fruitful line of analysis, since he stands at an ambivalent junction: Canadian media portrayed him as a veritable fiend outside of cultural normativity, but his “normate position of masculine, white, nondisabled, sexually unambiguous, and middle class”[[275]](#footnote-275) makes this endeavour difficult. In a *Maclean’s* article reporting on the beginning of Bernardo’s trial, there is a marked tension between his monstrous villainy and absolute mundanity:

The young man in the prisoner’s box is a broad-shouldered figure, his light brown hair closely cropped at the back and sides, his dark suit carefully pressed. At 30, he is good-looking, in a blank kind of way, and he grew up in a typical Canadian suburb. But last week, he stood accused of unspeakable crimes […].

Before [Crown prosecutor Ray] Houlahan outlined the Crown’s case, spectators began lining up at 5:30 a.m. for the 118 seats available to the public each day. “I wanted to get a good look at him,” said Charlene Price, a 23-year-old student from Newmarket, Ont. “I’ve seen him on the news and he looks like an average, everyday person.”[[276]](#footnote-276)

Bernardo drew attention for his crimes because he looked “average” and came from a “typical” Canadian upbringing. The mention of suburbia, the idyllic locus of the nuclear family, conjures images of whiteness, 1950s nuclear family virtues, and nation-building. Importantly, his description as an “everyday person” introduces a temporal and spatial aspect to his physicality: an “everyday person” is conceptualized as one available to be seen at any time walking down the street or shopping at a grocery store. As Stacey May Fowles writes, “The real terror was that it felt so ordinary and suburban, that the vilest acts occurred in the spaces we thought were safe. I was struck by the same sense of banality, looking at the home where Bernardo grew up. Evil was not foreign to our idyllic community.”[[277]](#footnote-277) As such, the assumed mundanity of Bernardo’s appearance and movements in society offers a “disturbing similarity” to the normative Canadian citizen. Of course, these terms are coded to conjure images of whiteness and innocence, and inversely reveal the effort required to produce Bernardo as an abject element and disseminate his ideological weight; Bernardo did not inherently ‘fit’ the role of monster because of his positionality as a typical white male, and was instead produced like a “letter on a page.”[[278]](#footnote-278) Configuring him as such then legitimates deploying aesthetic judgments for the purpose of social cohesion and affective clarity.

Lynn Crosbie’s *Paul’s Case*, a postmodern epistolary text, explores these dynamics through depicting the multiple ways in which Canadians have read Bernardo to various ends, as well as interrogates the role of serial killers in society more broadly. The first letter, for example, sets the intertextual tone of the book, beginning with an epigraph taken from Roland Barthes’ *S/Z:* “We shall therefore star the text, separating, in the manner of a minor earthquake, *the blocks of signification of which reading grasps only the smooth surface*.”[[279]](#footnote-279) In this section of the text, Barthes outlines a methodology of arriving at multiple meanings. Specifically, he encourages the reader to “cut up [sentences] into a series of brief, contiguous fragments” called *lexias*, and a “lexia will include sometimes a few words, sometimes several sentences […]: it will suffice that the lexia be the best possible space in which we can observe meanings.”[[280]](#footnote-280) It follows that Crosbie has attempted to divide Bernardo, as a readable element, into *lexias* through the epistolary structure of the text, and these *lexias* illuminate the multitude of meanings drawn from Bernardo; just as a viewer of “[t]he composite pictures of the Scarborough Rapist”[[281]](#footnote-281) may try to draw meaning (i.e., a knowable identity) from many small pieces forming a larger mass that will, inevitably, lead to identification of multiple people from one image, the text reflects this function. As Barthes writes, “The text, in its mass, is comparable to a sky, at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks.”[[282]](#footnote-282) Aggregating the *lexias* that Crosbie has produced into a single textual mass, *Paul’s Case* thus offers a way of reading Bernardo outside of the not only dualist logics of sensical/nonsensical, but also the moralist grammars of reason that frame rationality as good and irrationality as evil. Instead, readers are invited into a different hermeneutic project that positions Bernardo as the nonsensical element circulating upon the “flat and smooth” and “deep” surface of society to produce a sense capable of many meanings drawn from a single man’s actions.

In the same letter that includes a reference to *S/Z*, Crosbie’s fictitious letter-writer draws a connection between this multifaceted reading endeavour and the narrative of Bernardo’s crimes. The writer explains, “I had followed the trial. […] The disappearance and discovery of two teenage girls: one found in a lake, cut into pieces and placed in concrete blocks, the other found naked in a ditch with her hair cut off.”[[283]](#footnote-283) Crosbie clearly draws a connection between the reading-projectof the book with Paul’s murder and dismemberment of two teenage girls. I argue that aligning the search for meaning via lexias and Bernardo’s murders is dramatically imbalanced in moral significance in order to reveal how nonsense and sense work in our understandings of Paul’s actions: Crosbie is not so much interested in finding the intentions of Paul’s crimes, but instead exploring their affective results and, consequently, significance. The letter concludes, “Either way, I will present you in fragments. And make a figment of you. With one bone or sunken footprint, scientists have built killers,”[[284]](#footnote-284) referring to the skeletal recreations of ferocious dinosaurs kept in museums. “When I draw away,” the letter continues, “I see the wooden ligatures and pegs, their hollowed eyes. They are harmless, but I have never moved closer, to touch them.”[[285]](#footnote-285) This excerpt most clearly states that the book intends to build a multifaceted representation of Bernardo that, although obviously fictional, depicts the affective consequences of his crimes. It is important to note that, although media worked to produce and circulate him as a veritable evil in Canadian society, there were many affective registers that he struck within the population — some were awestruck, some were enraged, and some even felt attraction. However, these responses all work to make up the *bricolage* of affect that Bernardo stirred as a nonsensical figure circulating upon the surface of society.

Therefore, *Paul’s Case* does not intend to reveal a single reasonable meaning behind Bernardo’s crimes, instead framing truth as inacessible. A letter notes, “I want to mix things up with you. You will become confused and uncertain. Never knowing who I am. All of these voices and false/true documents.”[[286]](#footnote-286) The many letters depicting many interpretations of Bernardo do not work to produce an objectively true rationalization of Bernardo. Rather, Crosbie’s text uses Bernardo as a nonsensical figure to explore the conflicting, concomitant narratives and affective intensities that his crimes and trial brought about, as well as the nonsensical reasoning that is unrecognizably and simultaneously true and false. We can see the fruits of this exploration through the letter writers’ many indictments of the journalism that surrounded the trial. In these mentions of crime journalism, there is a critique of the assumed objectivity that journalism and legal structures uphold. For example, one of the letters reads, “Paul knows the truth, she [Karla Homolka] said on several occasions, nodding at you. *Toronto Sun* posters all over the city during the trial: your face framed with the legend THE TRUTH THE WHOLE TRUTH.”[[287]](#footnote-287) This excerpt juxtaposes Homolka’s testimony with an image of Bernardo and headline from the *Toronto Sun* declaring a “legend” of truth, which sets up two poles: on one side is the ‘truth’ that the Bernardo trial attempted to pin down, which is actually mythical, because there is no single truth; and on the other side is the cartographic key necessary to make sense of the ‘truth’ that the legal proceedings supposedly unearthed. Bernardo, functioning as the nonsensical element, thus produces a sense that involves both poles at once. Another letter accuses Christie Blatchford, one of the most famous journalists to cover Bernardo’s trial, of “carv[ing] blue lines through ideas, making equal and distant parts; the spaghetti western, her locus. […] To write herself, serious Christie. Who loves the law for its binaries […].”[[288]](#footnote-288) This excerpt chastises Blatchford for establishing a moral binary akin to those in spaghetti westerns, in which Bernardo represents evil, and broader society stands as the heroes defeating this dangerous threat. In sum, these two excerpts demonstrate the intention of *Paul’s Case,* which is to dismantle attempts at rationalizing Bernardo’s crimes that follow a dualist grammar, because, as one letter reads, “there are different perspectives, ways of interpreting your actions and trial. None of which have been explored since you are, in fact, A PSYCHOPATH.”[[289]](#footnote-289) This last excerpt speaks to Deleuze’s theorizations on the productive, flowing relationship between sense, nonsense, and affect, in that Bernardo circulates within society as a nonsensical element, producing sense that then affects signification, as well as our consequent responses; however, an understanding of this process has not yet extended into public consciousness, and, as such, a nonsensical element like a serial killer is often considered to be a manifestation of irrationality, incoherency, or an utter inability to control violent impulses. In other terms, the serial killer as nonsensical element is assumed to be afflicted by madness. Indeed, “[t]o the observer [the] motivation [of the serial killer] may not appear rational.”[[290]](#footnote-290) In fact, “[m]ost citizens simply assum[e] serial killers must be insane.”[[291]](#footnote-291) I suggest that the inability to fit a serial killer into the rational judicial system that requires a single unimpeachable truth is a direct result of the complicated tensions inherent in nonsense. Consequently, people turn to madness to rationalize the killer, because it is easier to make sense of “a few people go[ing] “crazy” sometimes”[[292]](#footnote-292) over a person “not considered to be insane or crazy but who enjoy killing others for ‘recreation.’”[[293]](#footnote-293) As James Alan Fox, Jack Levin, and Kenna Quinet note, “[I]t would be somewhat comforting if the Hollywood image [of serial killers] were at all accurate.”[[294]](#footnote-294) If they “looked like crazed maniacs […], they [serial killers] would be easily identified”[[295]](#footnote-295) and penalized according to the contemporary carceral logic born from the rational Enlightenment order.

## **The Nonsensically Mad as Aesthetic Judgment**

As previously stated, aesthetics is deeply connected to hermeneutics and madness, as aesthetics was “born as a discourse of the body,”[[296]](#footnote-296) a term that originates in the Greek *aesthesis*, or “the whole region of human perception and sensation.”[[297]](#footnote-297) In its interrogations of art and beauty, aesthetics probes the question of whether there is an objective or transcendent reality exterior to human existence, and thus how to interpret and discuss beauty as a universally recognized quality. Kantian and Hegelian metaphysics and aesthetics simultaneously interpellate the sensible into the ever-expanding structures and institutions of reason while expelling the sensible from reasonability. This double movement of “perceptual faith” in the sensible requires a concept of a mad, solipsistic existence as a ghostly foil subservient to and “penetrated by” reason. As a “perceptual faith” in a universal existence “common to the natural man and the philosopher”[[298]](#footnote-298) grew in popularity, mad experiences of the supposedly ‘objective’ world were ignored. Anxiety over the potential instability of meaning haunts writings of the time, including René Descartes’ theory of mind/body dualism, which, as summarized by Foucault, stood as an assurance to the public that “the truth will never slip away entirely into darkness.”[[299]](#footnote-299) This summary intends to align ‘truth’ with objectivity, meaning, and goodness, while darkness is associated with oblivion and an incapacity to gather knowledge. “Darkness” is thus aligned with falsehoods that shroud the ‘truth’ with impenetrable, mad language and articulations. Thus, madness was considered to be “precisely a condition of impossibility for thought.”[[300]](#footnote-300) Romantic philosophers picked up these anxieties and interwove aesthetic questions about the body and truth with reason and rationality. For example, Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* attempts to define both pure and practical reason, in which he labels the former as “understanding,” and suggests that pure reason “prescribes laws a priori for nature as an object of the senses.”[[301]](#footnote-301) In comparison, the latter “describes laws a priori for freedom and its peculiar causality as the supersensible in the subject,”[[302]](#footnote-302) stating that our sensate experiences are comprehendible via the rationality that originates in pure reason. In other words, the world is always already mediated through our own reasonable judgments that “confor[m] to law in accordance with the [purely theoretical] to find ends in accordance with the [purely practical].”[[303]](#footnote-303) Disagreeing with Kant’s hypothesis, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel published *The Philosophy of Art: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Aesthetics,* and claimed that “the world [is] the true symbol of reason.”[[304]](#footnote-304) Thus, Hegel de-centres cognitive functions from concepts of reasoning and rationality. Instead, he offers these qualities as exterior to human existence, as any given object of beauty concomitantly symbolizes and brings reason into being via the induction of cognition. Hegel thus aligns nature, or the conceptually sensible, with reasonability, gently probing what he calls “the chaos of the phenomena” that he defines via deferral to the sublime; chaos is “the fundamental intuition of the sublime,”[[305]](#footnote-305) which is, as defined by Longinus, the arousal and excitement of affective responses effectively “blinding”[[306]](#footnote-306) rationality. As with any other philosophical inquiries into this intangible, capacious realm, Hegel never fundamentally pins down what otherwise appears to “common understanding as lawlessness,”[[307]](#footnote-307) instead theorizing around it and admitting that there is meaning behind this ‘chaos’ before declaring universal reasonability: it is not simply “negation of form, but rather formlessness within the highest and absolute form, and, in a reverse fashion, absolute form within formlessness.”[[308]](#footnote-308) Hegel notes that “unsuccessful attempts” at “exhaust[ing] the chaos of the phenomena” through “understanding” eventually resign our “ordinary perception or knowledge” to take “the incomprehensibility itself” as a “principle of judgment.”[[309]](#footnote-309) Essentially, Hegel admits that the chaotic is a necessary essence to rational meaning-making projects, but also assumes that reasonability is a universal, transcendental intuition, as it can be found outside of us, in others and in the world. What is remarkable in both aforementioned works of these philosophers is the clear turn towards querying the sensate aspect of the soul when studying the properties of reason, rationality, and other hegemonic methods of meaning-making; however, they remain indebted to considering aesthetics within the realm of reason and order.

In *Our Aesthetic Categories,* Sianne Ngai considers the “undeniably trivial”[[310]](#footnote-310) aesthetics of the zany, the cute, and the interesting that harbour a “contradictory mixture of feelings at the foundation of each.”[[311]](#footnote-311) Each of these aesthetic categories are experienced as a “low, often hard-to-register flicker of [dissonant] affect”[[312]](#footnote-312) that results in affective ambiguity. When judging an experience as zany, for example, we initially notice the “flailing helplessness of excessively strenuous but unproductive exertion,”[[313]](#footnote-313) a recognition that produces an affective “ambigu[ity] as to whether one regards it [the zany actions] positively or negatively.”[[314]](#footnote-314) Ngai considers these aesthetic categories and their affective experiences within the context of late stage capitalist “social difference and conflict [that] underl[ies] the entire system of aesthetic judgment or taste,”[[315]](#footnote-315) arguing that these specific styles illuminate fundamental dynamics of relation to sociopolitical structures in remarkable ways. Her analysis of the zany, in particular, considers this aesthetic category as a “subjective, feeling-based judgmen[t], as well as [an] objective or formal styl[e],” in which the zany stands not only as a ““wa[y]” of perceiving an object,” but also “the set of objective qualities perceived”[[316]](#footnote-316) within the context of capitalism’s tightening grip on our personal relations to labour. In defining style as a fluctuating concept, referring to a “tension between change and stability,”[[317]](#footnote-317) Ngai’s particular line of inquiry into the zany considers performance and ambiguous, multi-layered affect couched within late-capitalist environments. As such, I suggest that analyzing the nonsensical as a variable style offers insight how it functions as an aesthetic; how it is mobilized as a judgment to capture certain bodies within its scope of ambiguous affect; and its foundation in “the traumatic, […] a familiar cultural narrative in late-capitalist societies.”[[318]](#footnote-318) In other words, the contemporary media habit of defining serial killers as “nonsensically mad” acts as a productive aesthetic judgment that reveals, “at the deepest level a discourse about its own intersubjective and affective dynamics.”[[319]](#footnote-319) What are the “intersubjective and affective dynamics” wrapped up in the nonsensical and the mad, and what can they tell us about our relations to these phenomena?

On its face, deeming a serial killer “nonsensical” may not seem like an aesthetic judgment, but defining this phenomenon as such reveals “its way of referring our feelings of pleasure and displeasure not just to objects or even our own subjective capacities, but also to the social matrix of others with whom we are compelled to share and confirm these feelings in public.”[[320]](#footnote-320) As such, judging Bernardo as nonsensical is an act of public feeling that “places him safely outside the bounds of normality, reinforcing both our own source of ordinariness and the ordinariness of community.”[[321]](#footnote-321) This judgment works to confirm Bernardo’s Otherness within the Canadian community, and uphold Canadian nationalist values.[[322]](#footnote-322) An example of how this judgment works is evident in Schmid’s consideration of serial killers in “freak shows,” which notes the affective tensions that arise from the nonsensical as aesthetic. Including H. H. Holmes, a British serial killer, in dime museum “freak show” exhibitions “offers the perfect strategy for internalizing commentary”[[323]](#footnote-323); spectators’ interactions with Holmes’ re-presentation are “institutionally mediated,” in which he and his artefacts are “removed from their original context.”[[324]](#footnote-324) Originally discussing the role of museums, Ngai quotes Philip Fisher, suggesting that the “power of the series lies in the skill with which each picture can exchange roles; now a sensory experience, exhaustively commented on by the rest of the series.”[[325]](#footnote-325) In other words, by including a depiction of Holmes alongside “freaks, criminals, self-made men, and con men,”[[326]](#footnote-326) visitors “were [methodologically] encouraged to view Holmes the “arch-fiend” as yet another freak, thus disavowing any potential connection between Holmes and the viewer of the exhibit.”[[327]](#footnote-327) As a result, the “cultural work” of the freak show “reassure[s] the spectator of his or her own normality”[[328]](#footnote-328) while simultaneously “emphasizing [the] madness” of the serial killer in order to produce him as “a monster rather than an Everyman”[[329]](#footnote-329) living in hegemonic reasonable society.

*Paul’s Case* depicts this affective dynamic:

Writing you allows me to feel constructive, to know who you are, who I imagine you are. In multiple, a sheaf of letters stacked and cut into the shape of one man, making a chain. Hand in hand, this chain-gang of one, dispatched to dig ditches, fissures, in the narrative. Anger, loathing, compulsion, attraction, clinical distance, abstraction.[[330]](#footnote-330)

Similar to the curated freak show, the epistolary structure demonstrates how Bernardo is produced like a “letter on a page”[[331]](#footnote-331) for various purposes through the text’s methodology of “imaginative investigation.”[[332]](#footnote-332) *Paul’s Case* illuminates the range of hermeneutic and affective undertakings that the Canadian public engaged in to rationalize and make meaning from Bernardo’s actions; while some letters express admiration and sexual desire, others articulate hatred and anger, going so far as to plot an assassination. In any case, the structure of the text acts as a serialized accounting of the judgments and readings that make Bernardo “into the shape of one man,” working to reveal how he is separated from normative Canadian society, and thus any context for his crimes, such as the patriarchal and white supremacist foundation of this nation. Further, Bernardo is placed among a series of affective responses that engage in conversation with each other. Indeed, the varying affective responses clearly depict the efficacy with which Bernardo drifts upon the surface of Canadian society to produce intense and dissonant. Crosbie even specifies that the text is a postmodern “critical enterprise”[[333]](#footnote-333) intended to re-present Bernardo and his crimes as socially constructed *bricolages*, or, as Crosbie defines, “makeshift repair[s] of the event[s],” manufactured with “materials, differently”[[334]](#footnote-334) to explore how sense is an experiential, affective, and nonsensical production. This endeavour is in direct opposition to the expectations of the reasonable justice system and the concept of criminal confession, which, as Sean Redmond notes, trusts the serial killer for an objective version of “higher-order truth-telling, and sense-driven authenticity.”[[335]](#footnote-335) As an example of this reliance, I turn to Henry Lee Lucas, an American serial killer who, in 1983, confessed to murdering hundreds of people, which the police simply accepted. “Decades later,” Mahita Gajanan writes for *Time Magazine*, “DNA testing showed he’d lied about killing at least 20 people. Of the hundreds of murders Lucas claimed to be responsible for, at least three can still be pinned to him […].”[[336]](#footnote-336) Thus, we can see how the serial killer is caught within a rational judicial system that relies on him to conform to sensical hermeneutics.

*Paul’s Case* ultimately diverges from the intent of the freak show, as the text is not designed to place Bernardo outside of normality. Instead, the book questions the hegemonic representation of Bernardo as an authentic embodiment of evil, and how he has come to take on that role. This investigation is introduced in the text’s first letter, in which the writer implies Bernardo is a *bricoleur,* stating, “You liked to cut and paste things too, I read; and it was disgusting, you said, dismembering a corpse.”[[337]](#footnote-337) Suggesting that “dismembering a corpse” is an attempt at making meaning, this sentence forces “the reader’s gaze […] onto the corpse”[[338]](#footnote-338) as a material product of Bernardo’s hermeneutic processes. The reader is also referenced in this letter through the rhyming of “I read” with “you said,” implying that the reading-project is a mirror of Bernardo’s articulations. Furthermore, within the sixth letter, a self-described psychoanalyst questions whether Bernardo “embedd[ed], within yourself, another narrative, one which was more relevant to your self-perception.”[[339]](#footnote-339) I argue that, unlike the freak show, Crosbie intends to illuminate our precarious proximity to Bernardo by forcing the reader’s gaze onto the problematic dualist grammar of truth and falsity that our judicial system is reliant upon. In other words, producing Bernardo through various reader-positions reveals the many ways in which the serial killer drifts and circulates as the empty square, actively constructing sense and significance away from comforting binaric logics:

To write herself, serious Christie. Who loves the law for its binaries, whose notions of beauty are almost poignant. Strange ducklings navigating the water, arching their necks and becoming swans; a caterpillar tearing at its chrysalis and taking flight in the colours of the Monarch; a desirable man she kills in her imagination each night.[[340]](#footnote-340)

*Paul’s Case* refuses and complicates binaries, which stand as the rational grammar of Western legality, as the excerpt suggests. Many letters reveal the cultural effect of the serial killer, the empty square that illuminates “the thinness of the line between right and wrongdoing and the unreliability of the social and psychic structures that ‘guarantee’ good moral order.”[[341]](#footnote-341) Bernardo drifts between opposing affective poles, such as hatred and desirability, creating an ambiguous affective tension that informs our hermeneutic undertakings. My theorizing assumes, as Brian Massumi states, affect “involv[es] feeling in thinking, and vice versa,”[[342]](#footnote-342) and to suggest that Bernardo is both A and, incoherently, B (fearful and desirable) disrupts the binaric logic of truth and falsity that underlies Western systems of reasonability. Instead, Bernardo “inhabit[s] two subject positions […] [b]eyond good and evil, in a region that is simulated”[[343]](#footnote-343) and mediated by affect.

Shoshana Felman argues that engaging in hermeneutic strategies of sense-making and -control is “a political project” that aims to “tak[e] over […] the very power implied by meaning.”[[344]](#footnote-344) Extending Felman’s brief, one-sentence gesture towards sense-making, it is clear that hermeneutic practices are politicized. In fact, sense-making is a highly ideological process that works to limit the potentiality of meaning within a dualist grammar predicated upon exclusion, sometimes for the benefit of a specific population and the detriment of another. To engage in a reading-project of Bernardothat uses dualist logics of sense/nonsense predicated on a formula of excess/lack reifies Western hermeneutics as legitimate “truth.” Binaries generally offer an opportunity for “radical exclu[sion]”[[345]](#footnote-345) of dangerous properties from the safety of fixed entities, an “eject[ion] beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable”[[346]](#footnote-346) into “the place where meaning collapses.”[[347]](#footnote-347) Thus, if Western hermeneutic practices can make a claim to objective truth, they relegate nonsense to the abject space of imploded meaning at the bottom of the rabbit hole. The nonsensical serial killer is “expelled to a different realm, where the danger he presents is disarmed. Doubly so, in that what he now represents is *the difference from the Other in the exteriority of others*.”[[348]](#footnote-348) This representation of the ‘ultimate’ exterior Other speaks to some of Western society’s worst fears, such as voids, isolation, disease, and death:

Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A “something” that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant […]. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me.[[349]](#footnote-349)

Due to its societal status as abject, we can apply Kristeva’s description of the abject as that which “*disturb[s]* identity, system, order,” and “does not respect borders, positions, rules”[[350]](#footnote-350) to nonsense. In comparison, normative Western hermeneutic processes are predicated upon “a myth of objectivization.”[[351]](#footnote-351) Therefore, in order to produce binaries of signification, such as truth and falsity, nonsense must be “permanently thrust aside,”[[352]](#footnote-352) or otherwise the obliteration of politically and ideologically powerful societal structures are at risk, such as “the gaze of reason”[[353]](#footnote-353); however, despite these attempts at suppression, nonsense is simultaneously present and absent within acts of public feeling. Akin to the aforementioned dynamic presences and absences of the Cheshire Cat, there is always a “shady”[[354]](#footnote-354) madness circulating upon articulations of nonsense that illuminates the fragile cracks in our hegemonic hermeneutic structures.

People are not mad until they are labelled as such for the convenience and usage of rational society, as “distinguish[ing] and […] identify[ing]” are “[t]wo operations […] traced back to the same root, which is the act of judging.”[[355]](#footnote-355) Indeed, madness is entirely interpretive, moulded and identified by media, government, and psy discourses for varying purposes. There is perhaps no better example of this dynamic than the story of Sidney Gottlieb, who can arguably be categorized as a serial killer. Gottlieb was an American government scientist who “had overseen medical experiments and “special interrogation” projects in which hundreds of people were tormented and many minds were permanently shattered.”[[356]](#footnote-356) Labelled by some as “a kind of genius,”[[357]](#footnote-357) and by others as “a mad scientist,”[[358]](#footnote-358) Gottlieb was one of the purveyors of Project Paperclip, in which the C.I.A. brought Nazi scientists over to America at the end of WWII, as well as the head of the MK-ULTRA mind control project. One book goes so far as to describe Gottlieb as “the maddest mad scientist,” before admitting that he was “smart enough to work for an organization that would not only allow him to poison and murder people with such aplomb, but would also protect him from the consequences awaiting any other sociopath.”[[359]](#footnote-359) Indeed, the arbitrary nature of applying labels such as madness and nonsense, as discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to John Ralston Saul, concedes to some killers and not others, so long as the murder was committed in the name of the empire of reasonability. As Voltaire wrote, “It is obvious to the whole world that a service is better than an injury, that gentleness is preferable to anger. It only remains, therefore, to use our reason to discern the shades of goodness and badness.”[[360]](#footnote-360) In response, Saul notes, “These are the sort of words which lead us to associate reason with morality, common sense.”[[361]](#footnote-361) If a killing is considered reasonable by Western logic, such as the murders committed by Gottlieb, then they are permissible and, in extreme cases, commendable under moral structures, evading any negative aesthetic judgments; however, if a murder is considered unreasonable, such as the murders committed by Bernardo, then they are chalked up to irrationality, considered senseless, and judged as nonsensically mad. This dynamic is a clear demonstration of how aesthetic judgments are used to alienate, categorize, and maintain power.

Sianne Ngai argues that there are “feelings of pleasure or displeasure that lie at the foundation of every aesthetic experience,”[[362]](#footnote-362) and the nonsensical as aesthetic is no different. In this case, the increasingly unstable concept of objective truth induces an ambivalent affective dissonance. If the zany is “really an aesthetic about work — and about a precariousness created specifically by the capitalist organization of work,”[[363]](#footnote-363) then I argue that the nonsensical is an aesthetic about truth, and the precarity of truth within a society hermeneutically/hermetically sealed by reason. This dynamic is, ultimately, revealed through the ‘insane’ serial killer, as evidenced in this excerpt from *Paul’s Case*, which ironically describes the previous ‘true crime’ books about Bernardo as “pornography”:

Maybe you have read the three books about you, though I doubt it. I mean, I don’t think you’re allowed to read pornography in jail. This is irony, which you may or may not know. I have read them all and I’m tired of the story. It never changes, and I want to mix things up with you.

You will become confused and uncertain. Never knowing who I am. All of these voices and false/true documents. As if you are in court again, drawing question marks on a legal pad. Or worse, as if you are desperately unhealthy: you have begun imagining things. Everything I am asking you to absorb or swallow.[[364]](#footnote-364)

In this excerpt, the letter writer argues that these “pornographic” texts exploit his victims’ unfortunate demises, and sensationalize his crimes in unsavoury ways, despite the fact that these texts, *Lethal Marriage* (1995), *Deadly Innocence* (1995), and *Invisible Darkness* (1996), are labelled under the genres of Biography and True Crime by most book retailers. Clearly, the letter writer takes issue with the truth claims implicated in these genres, and the categorization of these texts as such. The precarity of truth is further demonstrated in the mention of “[a]ll of these voices and false/true documents,” and the “question marks on a legal pad”; the letter writer refuses identification while describing items that are, within the judicial court system, presumed to hold unimpeachable truths, like legal documents and court filings. Then, the letter writer employs language evocative of disease, madness, and abjection alongside materials holding canonical “truths.” Thus, if we configure Bernardo as the nonsensical element N circulating within society as incoherently both truth A *and* falsity B (both rational A and irrational B), then the hermeneutic epistemes that produce meaning in Western society are illuminated, as well as the affective economies that come to work within said epistemes to produce material consequences; nonsense and madness reside at the core of these structures of knowledge, which dictate hegemonically ‘correct’ forms of meaning-making that become ratified as truths over time. These epistemes are then employed to differentiate between normative signification and a complete lack thereof. In other words, representations that employ the nonsensical as aesthetic constitute Bernardo as a madman capable of “great crimes without reason,”[[365]](#footnote-365) preventing both nonsense and madness from claiming any meaning or truth. A reasonable response to these “mad” crimes, then, is “incarceration, provided that it be rationally directed,”[[366]](#footnote-366) in order to prevent the danger associated with madness and upholding of hermeneutic structures. Foucault, in his explanation of the introduction of psychiatry into legal proceedings in the 19th century, writes, “[M]adness, by its nature, and even in its most discrete manifestations, [is] haunted by the absolute danger, death.”[[367]](#footnote-367) In particular, “insanity was seen as the cause of that which made no sense.”[[368]](#footnote-368) Foucault explicitly outlines how nonsense is legally, and more broadly, socially understood as connected to madness: madness is represented as a cause of nonsense, and thus sanity and rationality are the solutions. Nonsense and madness are then connected to fear: this “collective fear of crime, this obsession with this danger”[[369]](#footnote-369) has perpetuated the affective intensity that underlies nonsense as an aesthetic judgment. As such, labelling Bernardo as such imbues his image with affective responses that are explicitly tied to sanist epistemes working to produce hatred and fear of madness.

Indeed, the aesthetic judgment of nonsense is founded in a fear and hatred of madness, which has now become a facet of what has ballooned into the late capitalist culture of the “traumatic.” This cultural norm, Daniel Lea suggests, is a “foundation script by which individuals interpellate themselves into subjective positions.”[[370]](#footnote-370) Akin to Daniel Lea’s assertion of the economy of “the traumatic,” Mark Seltzer investigates America’s “wound culture.” In a summary of Seltzer’s work, Jack Halberstam notes,

[W]e live in a society so preoccupied with scenes of violence and violation that trauma has become “an effect in search of a cause” (Seltzer 1998, 257). Seltzer’s formulation of the psychological experience of trauma as belated or retrospective construction of the physical experience of violation describes perfectly the kind of attention directed at [victims of transphobia] [...]. A generous reading of this process, by which a community selects a violated member to represent otherwise unrepresentable damage, would see a transformation of a personal affront into a political one.[[371]](#footnote-371)

Although Halberstam specifically deploys Seltzer’s theory of “wound culture” in relation to Brandon Teena, a transgender man who was murdered by transphobes, I see the grammar of “wound culture” working in a similar yet converse way in Western society’s relegation of serial killers to the realms of nonsense and madness. Indeed, I argue that typical discourses on serial murder do not centre on the lives of the victims and survivors, instead positioning them as martyrs of, quite often, misogyny and/or madness; the serial killer takes up most of the discursive space in public discussions. For example, the media attention paid to Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French was notable, but it was, by and large, Bernardo’s face that populated media coverage of the trial. The serial killer thus comes to represent “otherwise unrepresentable damage,” as well as monstrosity, madness, and nonsense. But how does this representation come to stand in for the serial killer’s actual subjectivity? Further, how does this representation of murderous men work to disseminate affective responses to both madness and nonsense?

## **Affective Economies and Dis/ease**

Representing Bernardo as an irrational psychopath and accepting this label as “truth” fails to not only understand the affective ramifications of his crimes, but also consider the hermeneutic structures through which meaning is made understood within Western society. I suggest, then, that understanding nonsense as an aesthetic judgment reveals the ways in which truth is simply “[a] moveable host of metaphors […]: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions.”[[372]](#footnote-372) Nonsense as an aesthetic judgment draws seemingly unimpeachable truths into question, and consequently produces affective responses that do “not *reside* in a given subject or object.”[[373]](#footnote-373) Instead, these affects circulate through society to “align individuals with communities — or bodily space with social space — through the very intensity of their attachments.”[[374]](#footnote-374) This chapter contends that, when the aesthetic of nonsense is applied to the serial killer and disseminated, it produces affective investments that quickly stick to him, shifting his identity from that of a normative white man to that of an abject monster that “exert[s] equal parts repulsion and attraction, a fact that ensures their simultaneous abjection from and ingestion into the social in a process that is potentially infinite.”[[375]](#footnote-375) In other words, certain affects “stick” to Bernardo, such as hatred, anger, and fear, but also desire, lust, and pleasure. These affects align Bernardo with the Kristevian abject while also “endow[ing] [him] with meaning.”[[376]](#footnote-376)

In “Affective Economies” and “The Organisation of Hate,” Ahmed metaphorically extends Marxist economic “logic” in which “the more [signs] circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to “contain” affect.”[[377]](#footnote-377) This poststructuralist consideration of affect perceives emotions as “not contained within the contours of a subject,”[[378]](#footnote-378) and instead undergo movement and evolution. This dynamic details the “rippling effect” of emotions,[[379]](#footnote-379) in which they “mobilis[e]” to “animate the ordinary subject.”[[380]](#footnote-380) Ahmed elaborates on this “effect,” writing, “[E]motions work as a form of capital: […] affect […] is produced only as an effect of its circulation.”[[381]](#footnote-381) In other words, “the movement between signs converts into affect,” so that “the more [signs] circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to “contain” affect.”[[382]](#footnote-382) As an example in both texts, Ahmed closely reads a quote from the Aryan Nation website, which declares “love for the nation” as the reason for the group’s hatred of “imagined others.”[[383]](#footnote-383) Ahmed employs the asylum seeker as a figure that is evoked as an “imagined other,” an enemy of the nation, and yet the hatred directed towards them cannot be “locate[d] in a body, object, or figure.”[[384]](#footnote-384) Instead, the inability to point to a particular person as the “hated one” lends itself to the affective economy; hatred circulates, effectively “differentiat[ing] some others from other others, a differentiation that is never ‘over’ as it waits for others who have not yet arrived.”[[385]](#footnote-385) As a result, those configured as asylum seekers experience the very material results of the sign’s “accumulation of affective value”[[386]](#footnote-386); hatred for the asylum seeker “shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds”[[387]](#footnote-387) via hate crimes, structural racism and inequities, and more material consequences. In sum, “it is the failure of emotions to be located in a body, object, or figures that allows emotions to (re)produce or generate the effects that they do.”[[388]](#footnote-388)

This dynamic is also found in other figures aligned more closely with the serial killer, one of which is “the child-molester or rapist.”[[389]](#footnote-389) Akin to these figures, the circulation of the serial killer as a figure “produces a differentiation between “us” and “them,” whereby “they” are constituted as the cause or the justification of “our” feeling of hate.”[[390]](#footnote-390) The serial killer thus comes to circulate within Western society as a hateful, terrifying object, inducing affectual responses to “the other’s […] proximity,” which “is felt as the violence of negation against the body.”[[391]](#footnote-391) The body, in the case of Bernardo, is the Canadian body-politic, who have to understand the “senseless” act of murder as indicative of madness. As such, affects such as horror, disgust, interest, and curiousity often “stick” to nonsensically mad bodies, as evidenced in Alice’s reactions to the mad characters of Wonderland. If, as previously argued, the story’s frame implicates the reader within the nonsensical narrative, then it is fair to read Alice’s responses as indicative of hegemonic social beliefs, reactions, and affects at the time of publishing, responses which have demonstrated their power to remain naturalized and ‘common sense,’ even in the modern day. For example, during the tea party with the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse, the latter tells a story that “confuse[s] poor Alice,” leading her to interrupt with a reasonable question: “Why”?[[392]](#footnote-392) In response, the March Hare retorts, “Why not?”[[393]](#footnote-393) However, when the Dormouse asks an unreasonable question during its story, Alice, “very much confused,” begins saying, “I don’t think—” before the Hatter interrupts her and simply states, “Then you shouldn’t talk.”[[394]](#footnote-394) Alice, upset with “[t]his piece of rudeness […] got up in great disgust, and walked off.”[[395]](#footnote-395) It is notable that Alice, when faced with nonsensical logics deployed by mad subjects, reads them as inappropriate, is “disgust[ed],” and chooses to “wal[k] off” rather than engage with alternative articulations of meaning. The discursively formed affectual responses to nonsense and madness continuously reconstruct and reinforce her reactions to these phenomena. Her responses to the constant disruption of hegemonic hermeneutic processes portray the ways in which nonsense and madness manifest as discursively predetermined entities and articulations bound together in an affectual braid of fear, hatred, and curiousity grounded in desire.

The movement of affect is also a retrograde movement, and thus the given affective object incurs certain “conditions of its arrival” as it “brings the past encounters”[[396]](#footnote-396) into the present. In this conceptualization, the serial killer’s crimes and their affectual consequences are constitutive of his image, effectively shaping public representations of him. Thus, the serial killer as a theoretical and social object “is not reducible to [him]self, which means [he] does not “have” [a] “[him]self” that is apart from [his] contact with others.”[[397]](#footnote-397) In other words, the serial killer is prismatic; the ways in which society makes sense of this figure — the ways in which he is configured as an instrumental “empty square” — vary depending on interactions with him. As *Paul’s Case* demonstrates, none of the single accounts of Bernardo disqualify or exclude other letters, and these letters instead work together, both as a text and as singularities, to paint many pictures of the ways in which Western society produces sense from nonsensical fragments that are deeply embedded with assumptions of madness. Indeed, although Bernardo is relegated to a solitary confinement cell, he is still readable by virtue of his crimes; he is beyond the visible and effectively silenced, and yet his image speaks for him. The reader’s gaze thus conflates “[s]eeing and being […] in the constitution of the pathologized subject” so that Bernardo’s “subjectivity is intimately tied to the dark unknowability of that which stands outside the visible”[[398]](#footnote-398) but “is […] masked by the attention to the surface”[[399]](#footnote-399):

I’m a liar Paul; I have lied to you all along. Some of this is true. I could draw a line:

Everything above this line is true Everything above this line is false

I am disassembling, my motives and methodology eroding. There is disarray. […] Looking at Frank Davey’s book makes me wish that I could draw thick black lines through all of my letters, leaving one phrase: *I’m sorry —*

That I was able to talk to you about everything I wanted to say, and you did not scare me. […]

Sybiline, I have borrowed voices, spoken through others. To recover, what is unsaid.[[400]](#footnote-400)

This excerpt from the last letter of *Paul’s Case* directly references the “disarray” of objective truth, as well as the oscillation between affective poles that is the Deleuzian dynamic of nonsense. First, this quote spatializes the truth/falsity binary to distinguish how the fragility of truth is a material “surface effect” of nonsense, able to circulate based on affective sedimentation, evidenced in the evocation of Sybiline. The sibyls were oracles in Ancient Greece who spoke “with raving lips,”[[401]](#footnote-401) and thus the letter writer suggests they used others’ voices to “recover” the “unsaid” of Bernardo’s crimes; however, the writer of this excerpt seems to experience a deep ambivalence regarding their interpretation of Bernardo, apologizing for not feeling fear of Bernardo. In other words, this writer notes the impossibility of a single objective truth, and instead borrows multiple voices’ perspectives to regain an impression of Bernardo outside of accepted re-presentations, an engagement with Bernardo as a nonsensical element that produces ambivalent affects outside of the discursively legitimate affective responses.

Fear functions in a similar way to hatred, as fear cannot be located in a specific object, sign, or individual, “and it is this lack of residence that allows fear to slide across signs, and between bodies.”[[402]](#footnote-402) Indeed, “rather than being contained in an object, fear is intensified by the impossibility of containment.”[[403]](#footnote-403) Ahmed notes, that this movement “becomes stuck only temporarily, in the very attachment of a sign to a body,” where a sign then clings to a body, thus composes the body as “the object of fear, a constitution taken on by the body, encircling it with a fear that becomes its own.”[[404]](#footnote-404) Frantz Fanon speaks to this affective dynamic in his recounting of a child’s fear at the sight of his Black body, through which Ahmed outlines the differentiating quality of fear: “it is not a shared feeling, but works to differentiate between white and black bodies.”[[405]](#footnote-405) I suggest that the affective economy that circulates in relation to the serial killer follows a comparable dynamic, as the fear stuck to a serial killer constitutes an unknown figure as the object that is then labelled abject from society upon the discovery of his identity and capture. The similarities diverge when, Ahmed suggests, another’s fear becomes one’s own, as in the case of Fanon’s interaction. This deviation from Ahmed’s example is important, as it speaks to how whiteness functions in affective economies of fear and hatred that are primarily rooted in racism: the ease with which the grammar of this economy can be mapped onto serial killers, though initially theorized in relation to Black and other racialized bodies, illuminates how the latter are constructed as dangerous, while the former are configured through the frame of (white) innocence. As Judith Butler notes in “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” “The fear is that some physical distance will be crossed, and the virgin sanctity of whiteness will be endangered by [the] proximity”[[406]](#footnote-406) of Blackness. In comparison, Bernardo, and the vast majority of other serial killers, are unlikely to be configured as a threat “when [they] visibly occup[y] what Thomson terms ‘the normate position’”[[407]](#footnote-407) in Western society. Thus, it is imperative to acknowledge the whiteness of many of serial killers, and, in particular, the crimes committed by Bernardo and Homolka: the white victims were murdered by a white man and his white wife. There is absolutely a “virgin sanctity” of whiteness endangered in this scenario, in which whiteness is always-already assumed to be innocent, while Blackness is framed as dangerous and, therefore, criminalized.

Within the scope of this dissertation, though, I argue that the endangered element at play in the nonsensical as aesthetic and its consequent affective economies is, in fact, sanity, and therefore claims to objective truth. Butler takes apart the “visual field”[[408]](#footnote-408) that, in court, determined what was visible and what was not within the Rodney King video, and concludes that it was produced through a “racist episteme.”[[409]](#footnote-409) Similarly, Bernardo’s crimes are formed through a sanist episteme that establishes certain acts as visible and others as invisible, working to fabricate a formula of violence in which Bernardo’s actions are “torn from [their] temporal place” and both “decontextualized” and “recontextualized.”[[410]](#footnote-410) The sanist schema thus “interprets the event,” in Butler’s words, but notably does not “orchestrate”[[411]](#footnote-411) it. In fact, the “orchestrating” factor, I suggest, is misogyny and whiteness; although we assume madness is the dangerous element at play in serial killing, it is actually whiteness and misogyny that allowed Bernardo to commit these crimes. As Penelope Scott sings in her now viral song, “Lotta True Crime,” “Well, I hope this doesn’t seem too impolite/But Ted Bundy was just never that fucking bright/He was just sorta charismatic and white, alright?/And he was so fucking sure he had the right.” However, to admit on a societal scale that whiteness and misogyny are the actual pathological elements in serial killing would be to admit that our sociopolitical structures are problematic and harmful. Indeed, Park Dietz, a famous forensic psychologist, has noted, “Any popular notion that serial killers are crazy people is just wrong”[[412]](#footnote-412); these men are, by and large, able to take advantage of sociopolitical institutions that deem them normate and non-threatening.

Many, from activists to authors[[413]](#footnote-413), have described whiteness and misogyny with the language of disease, most often as metaphor. Indeed, describing whiteness as a pandemic or misogyny as a social disease paradoxically uses metaphor to make tangible the trauma and suffering that populations oppressed under these forces experience. The metaphor of illness or disease is undergirded by a simple equation: “health being evidence of virtue as disease was of depravity.”[[414]](#footnote-414) The logic of this metaphor instills “[f]eelings about evil” that are then “projected onto a disease” so that “the disease (so enriched with meanings) is projected onto the world.”[[415]](#footnote-415) Thus, in ascribing discourses of disease to oppressive societal forces like whiteness and misogyny, the labellers effectively aim to translate the material life-draining consequences of subjugation to those ignorant to the effects of these systems. As “[t]he metaphorized illnesses that haunt the collective imagination are all hard deaths” that are “dehumanizing,”[[416]](#footnote-416) those who oppressive forces dehumanize utilize metaphors of disease that are used against Others; one need only to turn to politicians, who often use disease to metaphorize racialized populations living within a fantastically conceived “white nation”: the former President of France, “Nicolas Sarkozy, publicly label[led] Muslim immigrants ‘gangrene’ and ‘scum,’ and Danish MP Pia Kjærsgaards call[ed] Muslims ‘a cancer in Denmark.’”[[417]](#footnote-417) As Sontag writes, “To describe a phenomenon as a cancer is an incitement to violence,”[[418]](#footnote-418) and is “implicitly genocidal.”[[419]](#footnote-419) Flipping the metaphor so that it projects the evil of disease back onto the racists who deploy it may work as a liberatory tactic but does not alter its terms, and so metaphors of disease continue to pass both “moral” and “aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny,”[[420]](#footnote-420) effectively re-producing the diseased as “maddened animals — unleashing uncontrollable sexual, blasphemous impulses.”[[421]](#footnote-421) Indeed, there is a deeply forged connection between madness and disease.

Metaphors of disease are popularly accepted as not only an explanation for the “senseless” actions of a lone individual afflicted with madness, but also a justification for his abjection from general society. Like this, Bernardo is a “social text in which corruption [is] made visible,”[[422]](#footnote-422) and configured as an evil plaguing society that must be expunged; however, this conceptualization does little to interrogate the biopolitical structures that Bernardo exploits as a normative white man. Rather than re-cognizing the sociopolitical foundations of whiteness and misogyny that position feminine bodies as precarious and “differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death,”[[423]](#footnote-423) and allowed Bernardo to exercise his “bodily form of privilege”[[424]](#footnote-424) unobstructed, these ideological grounds remain intact. In order to proceed, Bernardo *must* be identified as mad, and subjected to metaphors of dis/ease that centre on assumptions of evil and “that insanity can produce not just behavioral disorders, but absolute crime, the crime which transgresses all the laws of nature and of society.”[[425]](#footnote-425) Using metaphors of disease then “lea[d] us to view the entailments of the metaphor as being *true,*”[[426]](#footnote-426)consequently legitimizing judgments of Bernardo and his “irrational” crimes as abject matter out of place, despite the fact that his actions are in keeping with the biopolitical logic of Western society that mark certain populations as precariously vulnerable. Thus, within this context, we can see how metaphors of disease are grounded in the moral and aesthetic judgment of madness and nonsense, from which we can investigate how Bernardo, as a “senseless” murderer, is framed as an anomaly in Western society for productive purposes.

## **Hermeneutic Execution**

If the metaphors of disease typically used to conceptualize Bernardo and his crimes imply madness, and thereby irrationality and nonsense, we can use his labelling as “mentally ill”[[427]](#footnote-427) to probe how his abjection illuminates Western society’s positioning of madness and nonsense as phenomena in close proximity to the untouchable border of death. To begin, it is important to note that Bernardo is configured as an abject element in society, akin to madness and nonsense. Julia Kristeva believes that the abject is not “a definable *object,*”[[428]](#footnote-428)meaning that it is not a material substance easily named or imagined. Rather, “[t]he abject has only one quality of the object — that of being opposed to *I*.”[[429]](#footnote-429) As a result, the abject, “jettisoned object, is radically excluded,”[[430]](#footnote-430) although it remains “close,” yet “it cannot be assimilated.”[[431]](#footnote-431) As an example, Kristeva uses the visceral nausea that occurs upon consuming sour milk: “I expel *myself,* I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*.”[[432]](#footnote-432) The items that have left her body lead her to declare, “Not me. Not that. But not nothing either.”[[433]](#footnote-433) This theory describes the productive positioning of the serial killer, in which his abjection works twofold: the serial killer is a “jettisoned object” framed as oppositional to — yet inextricable from — Western society; and he always remains in close proximity to the corpses that he has produced. Crosbie interrogates this dynamic, writing,

Here, in the interior of the exterior, he arranges his body into a lotus and creates

*a contour against the void*.

There was anger once: his life was ugly and cruel. He knows now that he stepped into his shadow: a foolish child who cowered in fear, who turned, becoming fearsome. Living without pity and without contempt. How the undead deride the living, how tenderly they lock together when, hidden from the sun, they cleave to the moist ceiling of the cave.[[434]](#footnote-434)

Pregnant with meaning, this quote begins with locating Bernardo in his solitary confinement cell, inside the penal institution that stands as one of the ultimate exterior spaces of Western society. From here, he arranges his body into a lotus, a symbol of enlightenment, in order to create an outline against an as of yet unqualified void. Within the scope of this discussion, I view this “arrangement” of Bernardo as a “monstrous border patrol,”[[435]](#footnote-435) policing the border between life, and death and unknowability. This circling movement at the border of life and death runs parallel to the dynamic of the first Deleuzian figure of nonsense, which is mobilized to produce sense. Indeed, introducing abjection into theorizations of Bernardo as a nonsensical element allows us to figure how Bernardo generates sense, identity, and rationality. After all, Kristeva writes, “Abjection is edged with murder, murder is checked by abjection.”[[436]](#footnote-436) She continues on to argue that waste, corpses, and garbage reveal “what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the border of death.”[[437]](#footnote-437) From the precipice of this border, we “extricat[e]”[[438]](#footnote-438) ourselves, and construct a base sense of an identity as that which is alive. On the other side of the line, though, the abject “disturbs identity, system, order.”[[439]](#footnote-439) It is here that the corpse is located, and “occasions the greatest concentration of abjection,”[[440]](#footnote-440) as the corpse is stripped of life, identity, and rationality. The serial killer, as nonsensical element and producer of abject corpses, not only remains in close proximity to these abject non-present subjects, but also generates how we make sense, both rationally and affectively, of them and death more broadly.

To explain this concept further, I turn to Ewa Domanska’s readings of the significance of the corpse that occupies and represents a temporal phase that she terms “[t]he non-present past.”[[441]](#footnote-441) Existing but not quite, Domanska suggests that the dead body “haunts […] and therefore cannot be controlled or subject to a finite interpretation.”[[442]](#footnote-442) In this hauntological dimension, she argues, “desperate human desires to preserve the delusive continuity of life (history, memory, monuments — immortality) do not reach but […] the continuity of death manifests itself.”[[443]](#footnote-443) I argue that the non-present past occupies the solitary confinement cell within which Bernardo now lives. Represented as a nonsensical element that is always positioned in close proximity to abject corpses, the meaning of the serial killer is always already deferred and continuous. Indeed, “[t]he ultimate in abjection is the corpse,” as “[i]t signifies one of the most basic forms of pollution — the body without a soul.”[[444]](#footnote-444) As such, the serial killer’s proximity to the corpse and subsequent association with abjection functions to produce different variations of sense; sometimes, this sense serves to arrange Bernardo as an agent of a morbid border patrol policing how we conceive of life and death, as the abject “threatens to destroy life,” but “also helps to define life.”[[445]](#footnote-445) This sense also works to characterize Bernardo as mad and diseased.[[446]](#footnote-446) In all cases, there is still a facet of unknowability that tinges our grasps at the sense that Bernardo produces because there is no possibility of a “finite interpretation,” or objectively true meaning to his actions or death. In this way, serial killers stand as remarkable representations of the unknowability inherent in meaning, because they are “contour[s] against the void”: living harbingers of death that are more persistent and spectacular in their reminders that unknowable darkness is always already haunting every aspect of our hermeneutic foundations.

In her essay on affective economies, Sara Ahmed explicitly notes that “fear is intensified by the impossibility of containment,”[[447]](#footnote-447) and thus Bernardo’s physical absence from society yet active influence over Canadian understandings of life and death effectively intensify the fear that sticks to his body. The container of his absence, his solitary confinement cell, acts as a spatial representation of the non-present past of his crimes, the corpses he has produced, and the sense that he generates as a nonsensical element. Explaining the process of recognition, Ricoeur writes, “The sudden disappearance of the object makes it exit our field of visual perception and introduces a phase of absence that the perceiving subject does not control.”[[448]](#footnote-448) Indeed, despite the fact that Bernardo is physically locked away from society’s field of vision, a “shadow of death hangs over [his] disappearanc[e]”[[449]](#footnote-449) that he caused with his own murderous actions. As Crosbie writes later in the above quote, Bernardo “stepped into his shadow,” noting that the undead and the living are intertwined, sticking closely to “the moist ceiling of the cave,” away from sunlight. I argue that Crosbie intends to signal Plato’s allegory of the cave, which theorizes anyone who does not know his Theory of Forms are chained, immobile prisoners who incorrectly name shadows cast by puppeteers as real objects. This metaphysical and epistemological allegory argues that we may acquire understandings of concepts via perceptual experiences, but the concepts that we grasp within our minds are not the same as what we perceive. Thus, within the context of this excerpt, Bernardo “stepp[ing] into his shadow” suggests that, while he is *perceived* as the real manifestation of death, in reality, he is not. Instead, he is a mere shadow of death, a “residu[e]” of a violent non-present past event that is used as an “instrument[t] of manipulation helpful in creating a desirable vision of the past.”[[450]](#footnote-450) This formation, along with his relegation to the exterior, ensures that Bernardo can be framed as a fearsome anomaly, which is desirable within Western society, as this shaping of him effectively obfuscates the societal institutions that made Bernardo, as previously referenced, “so fucking sure he had the right” to kill women.

Thus, in order to assuage our fear of Bernardo as both a product and necessary element of society, we attempt to contain him and lock him away; however, as evidenced in reference to Plato’s cave, there is a clear “impossibility of containment”[[451]](#footnote-451) that intensifies societal fear. As Stacey May Fowles writes, “I came across a story that ran in the *Star,* published soon after the trial concluded, which argued that Bernardo was not the monster we wanted to believe him to be, but rather “one of us,” a product of our culture, a man groomed with a pervasive, violent hatred of women.”[[452]](#footnote-452) To encounter Bernardo, or the operating factors that ensured his continued reign of terror, is to encounter fear. Kristeva suggests that we encounter this affect “when death brushes us by, depriving us of the assurance mechanical use of speech ordinarily gives us, the assurance of being ourselves, that is, untouchable, unchangeable, immortal.”[[453]](#footnote-453) I once heard a story about a woman swimming in an outdoor public pool in Scarborough who suddenly felt eyes on her. She came up for air and saw a man staring at her from the other end of the pool, not moving. The hair on the back of her neck stood up, and so she grabbed her towel and ran. The man, she later learnt from seeing his picture on the news, was Bernardo. Terrifying, of course, but I am interested in those moments when she was still underwater and something shifted — she became intensely aware of her body, her mortality, the fact that she is alive and vulnerable. Her instincts responded to the non-present past coming to bear down on her body, exacted through the eyes of not an evil monster or mentally ill person, but a perfectly average man whose proximity to death haunts him like a shadow; whose image we use to represent senselessness, madness, and fear; whose crimes are really an excessive proliferation of societal logics, framed under the guise of nonsense.

## **On/ward**

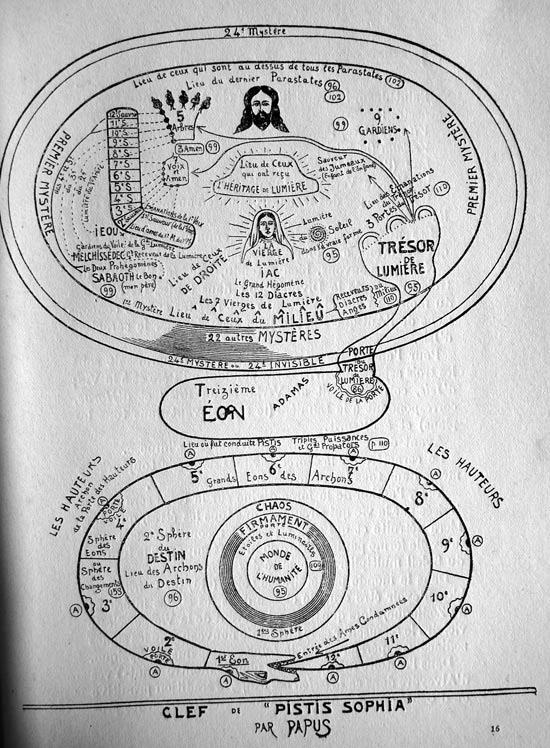
Although it may seem strange to end a chapter with an analysis of the beginning of a text, I feel as though we are treading deep within a forest of strangeness. So, *Paul’s Case* begins with a “postcard”[[454]](#footnote-454) within its contents section that acts as a legend for the *Pistis Sophia*, drawnby a esoteric occultist named Gérard Encausse, also known by the pseudonym Papus. The image, with captions written in French, is half of a larger drawing that offers a rendering of the Gnostic cosmology. The particular section of the drawing that is included within *Paul’s Case* specifically depicts the material world of humans, featuring an ouroboros divided into twelve aeons and a sphere within the middle split into multiple sections, the outer of which is labelled ‘chaos,’ and the inner labelled ‘the world of humans.’ Gnosticism, an ancient group of proto-Christians, suggests that the material world of humans is one in which we do not belong, and we “continue to be reincarnated in a world of pain and suffering and evil [...].”[[455]](#footnote-455) Upon death in the material world, humans are only able to ascend via knowledge of every archons’ names as they travel through each concentric circle that encases the Earth. Otherwise, like the ouroboros, we are destined to remain on an Earth created by an imperfect, ignorant, and in some accounts, evil god named Ialdabaoth. Without the knowledge required for ascension, humans are stuck in a “delusional prison that is the material world.”[[456]](#footnote-456)

Crosbie’s inclusion of this rendering of the material world according to Gnosticism is odd, and begs the question of relevance to Paul Bernardo’s crimes, as well as the broader goal of her epistolary text. Can it be read as a symbol of hope, to assume that Bernardo’s victims will be reincarnated? Or, is it an indictment of the evil inherent in humanity, concentrated in Bernardo for the sake of the text? David Brakke, a theologist of ancient religions and specialist on gnosticism, argued that theologists apply the label of gnosticism to early Christian groups anachronistically, without recognizing the social dynamics of the time that actually had “fundamental conflicts between competing modes of Christian authority, spirituality, and social organization.”[[457]](#footnote-457) While some proto-Christian groups attempted to close the biblical canon, others were adding to it with secret books, evolving philosophies, and broader cosmological details. For example, The Secret Book of John considers the true god to be “always absolutely completely in light.”[[458]](#footnote-458) Conversely, the human world is dark, riddled with problems, and remains unilluminated by superior, higher knowledge.

This elaborate drawing of Gnostic cosmology, within its context as a postcard of “content” in *Paul’s Case,* works twofold: it is not only an indictment of the public’s willingness to forget Bernardo’s crimes while locking him away, but also questions the nature of evil within rationalist discourse. As described by the summary on the back jacket of the book, “A woman demands answers to the questions that no one has asked. [...] [I]solated in a world that would rather forget, that actively denies the existence of monsters, she is both afraid and intent on revenge.”[[459]](#footnote-459) While I do not think that this summary is entirely accurate in relation to the nature of this postmodern book, I do believe that Crosbie included this image of the human realm in Gnosticism to point out the blissful ignorance of Canadian society. As a settler state established upon unceded Indigenous land, Canada is founded upon histories of violence and suffering at the hands of white colonizers that act as precedent for the crimes against women and girls that Bernardo carried out. Thus, the Gnostic belief that humans are cluelessly stuck within an evil world and unable to ascend towards enlightenment proves particularly applicable to the land and the settler inhabitants of formally cartographed Canada, in which Bernardo’s crimes fit within a broader sociopolitical schema of white men causing fatal harm to marginalized populations. As explored throughout this chapter, in order to maintain this ignorance towards legacies of vulnerable groups’ suffering, Bernardo is rendered mad, nonsensical, and, ultimately, evil, reinforcing an oppositional binary that always already determines the mad as inherently evil and possessed, and the sane as good and reasonable. In other words, there is a blissful ignorance to the deadly macrocosmic conditions undergirding the ableist, sanist ideologies that determine Bernardo and white serial killers like him to be ‘evil.’ Cultural critic and Afromantic writer La Marr Jurelle Bruce eloquently outlines this societal dynamic, while also bringing a different definition of evil into focus:

The term *evil* is often affixed to anything that dramatically opposes the moral codes of an avowedly good majority — much like the term *mad* is ascribed to whatever perplexes and vexes the avowedly sane majority. However, over the past thousand years, myriad atrocities have ensued when supposedly *good* majorities label outsiders *evil* and set upon combatting, correcting, or cleansing away said evil. [...] I propose a different notion of evil: I regard it as a radical will to harm, without mercy or compunction, that seeks, wreaks, and relishes said harm. This definition indicts many of the so-called good leaders and majorities [...], exposing the vicious irony that much evil is committed in the name of, and under the cover of, ‘good.’[[460]](#footnote-460)

Pointing to the bias inherent in the moralistic deployment of the labels ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ Bruce turns to historical events of cruelty in order to illuminate the ironic overlap between these two supposedly oppositional elements. Thus, determining Bernardo as mad, evil, and worthy of panoptic surveillance within his prison cell offers a foil through which Canadian society can and does define itself as inherently ‘good’ when, in fact, this land is literally built upon the graves of thousands of Indigenous children. Considering Bernardo and his crimes against women as anomalies ultimately reifies white supremacist reason within settler Canadian society.



**Chapter Two: The Feminized Mad Subject**

As Phyllis Chesler notes in the updated 2005 edition of her book, *Women and Madness,* “Theoretically, all men, but especially white, wealthy, and older men, can act out many disturbed (and non-disturbed) drives more easily than women can.”[[461]](#footnote-461) She continues, “Men are generally allowed a greater range of acceptable behaviors than are women.”[[462]](#footnote-462) As my first chapter makes clear, the serial killer and his crimes act as a nonsensically mad aesthetic, as well as hermeneutic elements upon the surface organization of society, a dynamic that makes murder a viable option for these men. Despite his crimes, the serial killer experiences the surface as “an open field composed of thresholds or gateways, […] a continuous space of passage”[[463]](#footnote-463) within which he circulates and is circulated as a productive empty square precisely because of his whiteness and masculinity. The patriarchal structures that reinforce this dynamic produce an economy of sense maintained at the surface via “discredit[ing] or marginaliz[ing] ways of giving meaning to experience.”[[464]](#footnote-464) The experience of feminine madness, for example, is erased at this level, an omission that functions to “contro[l] […] passage across thresholds,”[[465]](#footnote-465) such as the surface organization, “the rational, thetic structure of the symbolic order” whose “sovereignty” is “threaten[ed]” by “feminine forms.”[[466]](#footnote-466)

In the introduction to this dissertation, I take time to catalogue the femininity[[467]](#footnote-467) attributed to certain aspects of nonsensical madness. As Sewell explains, the ultimate form of madness and nonsense is “typical not only of magic, but of dream as well, with its extension into nightmare and delusion.”[[468]](#footnote-468) This statement glosses over the fact that, as Weedon writes, “poetic language and languages of mysticism, madness and magic” are seen as “feminine […] forms and aspects of language,”[[469]](#footnote-469) and are therefore devalued and repressed due to a societal genealogy of misogyny. Instead, “[m]ale sexuality and desire […] [are] the organizing principle[s] of the symbolic order and the source of the type of rational language through which social power is exercised.”[[470]](#footnote-470) As such, articulations of madness that have come to be associated with the feminine, such as hysteria, “appea[r] irrational, untrustworthy, and difficult to control,”[[471]](#footnote-471) a taboo according to the organizing principles of Enlightenment reasonability that can easily — and often does — tip into the realm of monstrosity. Indeed, the mad feminine person is a monster, a polluted object that forces “an encounter between the [masculine] symbolic order and that which threatens its stability”[[472]](#footnote-472) through bodily difference. As Barbara Creed notes, “The modern horror film [...] deliberately point[s] to the fragility of the symbolic order in the domain of the body.”[[473]](#footnote-473) Using mad feminine characters as a plot device to explore theological motifs of possession is common in horror films, such as in *The Exorcist.* Regan, the main character and girl-child possessed by an evil force, “belongs to that lineage of dual personality horror figures” that stand as “a figure of abjection in that the boundary between self and other has been transgressed.”[[474]](#footnote-474) via possession or invasion. *The Exorcist* has been read as exploring “female monstrousness and the inability of the male order to control the woman whose perversity is expressed through her rebellious body.”[[475]](#footnote-475) Similarly, madness located in the feminine body — and especially the white feminine body — is viewed as an invasion of all of the moral virtue that Western society ties up in reproductive futurity, whiteness, and virtue.

To further expose this dynamic, I bring examples together from seemingly disparate sources in order to illuminate the insidious effects on feminine people that this view of madness produces, as well as to articulate the ways in which mad femininity has been and continues to be constructed across historic moments in popular culture. These examples matter, because they unveil the true life-altering damage that problematic representations of feminine madness can produce in sanist epistemes. First, I consider the ways in which Britney Spears has been re-cognized as a mad feminine person after her highly publicized 2007 ‘breakdown,’ and the ways in which her family and the psychiatric-judicial system categorically stripped her of her money, medication, resources, and agency. I then briefly discuss the hysterical white feminine person, and the reproductive futurity that is tied up in her body. Moving on, I use Cassandra and the Furies from Agamemnon’s *Orestia* to outline the histories that ground our understandings of mad femininity, from Classic literature to Sigmund Freud’s diagnosis of Dora as hysterical. While these texts clearly display feminine expressions of nonsense and madness, I intend to think along with these characters’ hysteria as radical and full of potential while also introducing the Deleuzian second series of nonsense.

In this chapter, I also use two Canadian[[476]](#footnote-476) texts that distinctly depict the mad feminine subject, and the oppression she experiences at the hands of others’ patriarchal hermeneutic projects alongside the second figure of Deleuzian nonsense. Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Emma Donoghue’s *The Wonder* are two fictional texts that I have encountered throughout my academic career that I believe have interesting examples of feminine madness, as both track characters that reckon with subjugation at the hands of patriarchal structures of logic in different ways while also reveling in the feminine characters’ experiences with madness. *Surfacing* features an unnamed narrator who suffers through a cottage getaway in Quebec with multiple annoying men as she attempts to solve the mystery of her father’s disappearance. *The Wonder* follows a nurse trained under Florence Nightingale who is sent to Ireland in the midst of the famine to investigate a young girl who has stopped eating, claiming that she can survive off of manna from heaven. Both of these texts depict female characters who embody madness via the second series of nonsense, deemed as such by the surrounding characters that stand in for logocentric ideologies, as well as the hegemonic hermeneutic practices of Western readers. In other words, this chapter uses *Surfacing* and *The Wonder* to explore nonsensical madness as a feminine embodied state, and the possibility of meaning-making amidst masculine rational control over the symbolic order.

These are the flaws and feelings of a reading practice based on the symbolic order, and so I present a potential solution in the conclusion to this chapter: auto-theory, I argue, is a feminist and ethical method of taking on a reading-project. Grounded in histories of *écriture feminine,* auto-theory is a contemporary feminist theory of artistic production that attempts to perform the process of meaning-making alongside the reader. I argue that auto-theory offers a potential venue for a hermeneutics of the mad subject, as this mode of artistic production is predicated upon a matrix of potential meanings, as well as an awareness of how those meanings are activated, and how they are put to work within broader society without upholding diametric oppositions or phallocentrism.

## **The Mad Feminine Subject as Second Series**

I argue a specific hermeneutic reading-project is taken up when presented with mad femininity as opposed to the mad masculine subject. Indeed, madness has been linked to femininity in a way that has set up this gendered positionality as diametrically opposed to reason and sense, going so far as to align feminine madness with immorality in a way that articulates specific socio-national anxieties about, in particular, white feminine bodies. As stated in the introduction, one needs to look no further than Britney Spears, who, through popular media like tabloids and talk shows, became a symbol of the Foucauldian fear of “the being-already-there of death.”[[477]](#footnote-477) Her inability to perform neoliberal governmental femininity — “thin, blond, buff, feminine, contained”[[478]](#footnote-478) — after 2007 due to madness, Spears is now forced to over-perform this role. As she recently testified in court during a hearing against the allegedly abusive conservatorship put in place after her infamous 2007 ‘meltdown,’ “[M]y precious body, who has worked for my dad for the past fucking 13 years, trying to be so good and pretty. So perfect. When he works me so hard. […] My lawyer, Sam, has been very scared for me to go forward because he’s saying if I speak up, I’m being overworked in that facility of that rehab place, that rehab place will sue me.”[[479]](#footnote-479) Spears’ testimony reveals the underlying assumption of immorality that “play[s] out primarily in the arena of the body: gendered, out of control and refusing an easy [post-feminist] categorisation.”[[480]](#footnote-480) While, as Julia Borossa notes, this dynamic legally and societally dates back to the 19th century figure of the hysteric; before the medicalization of feminine madness,

[t]he most common explanation of what was wrong […] was that of possession by the devil; the figure of the witch was superimposed on that of the hysteric. Following suit, the most common response became a legal one involving the severest punishments — for example, burning at the stake.[[481]](#footnote-481)

Keeping this in mind, it is no wonder that Spears must fight for her agency not only in doctors’ offices and psychiatric wards, but also courts, depicting a legal and Western societal dynamic that dates back to the 19th century figure of the hysteric. As Borossa notes, the hysteric is a figure that is representative of feminine madness, coming “to embody femininity itself, as problem and enigma”[[482]](#footnote-482) — a gendered problem and medical enigma that was “certainly perceived as an illness, but an illness inseparable from a certain way of behaving badly, one which was (and largely still is) perceived as feminine.”[[483]](#footnote-483) As such, patriarchal institutional gazes, such as those in “prisons and hospitals,” which “tend to bear similarities”[[484]](#footnote-484) to each other, work to surveil specific behaviours deemed ‘appropriate’ for feminine bodies, thus producing a specific kind of femininity through regulatory and normalizing efforts. Consequent to this expression of power, anyone who pushes against these norms is deemed a ‘mad woman.’ As Spears’ boyfriend from 2007 notes, “A lot of people argue that she was crazy, right? […] Would you say she was upset, would you say she was angry, or would you say she was hurt? I’d choose all of those [words] before I’d choose crazy.”[[485]](#footnote-485) It is sometimes unbelievable how often specific forms of misbehaviour are gendered as feminine.[[486]](#footnote-486)

There is a highly charged Western fear of white girls losing their innocence and delving into madness, a fear that brings the discourse surrounding Spears’ madness into focus. This fear is predicated upon the assumption that white girlhood is a locus of innocence, and an always contested site of reproductive futurity. As Kathryn Bond Stockton writes in her addition to her revolutionary text *The Queer Child,* “Anglo-America, caught in a dream from which it won’t awake, is steeped in fantasies of vaporous innocence. These are largely suburban-driven fantasies”[[487]](#footnote-487) that influence how girls are conceived of and treated in Western society. Stockton continues, “It is a privilege to need to be protected,” and it is this privilege that allows “the all-important feature of weakness [to] stic[k] to these signs (white and middle class) and helps signal innocence.”[[488]](#footnote-488) In relation to Spears, we can see how her movement from white girlhood to womanhood was a source of anxiety, and her madness became a sticking point through which cultural fears of idealized femininity, reproduction and nation-building, and innocence and corruption were fortified. Comparing her 1999 *Rolling Stone* cover to the eventual tabloid coverage that attempted to “‘make sense’ of what was happening,”[[489]](#footnote-489) reveals these cultural anxieties. In particular, Spears’ *Rolling Stone* cover features her in underwear, lying on a bed in her childhood bedroom, holding a Teletubby doll: hypersexualized yet innocently staring at the camera, this photograph became indicative of what people expected from her image as she became eponymous with the ideal of American girlhood, capturing “that dichotomy of what a teenage girl is.”[[490]](#footnote-490) She was, as outlined by her ex-husband’s attorney in the telling documentary, *Britney vs. Spears* (2021), “America’s sweetheart.”[[491]](#footnote-491) This image stands as a counternarrative to the photographs of her shaving her head in 2007, a symbolic shearing of her idealized femininity so that “she no longer embodie[d] the All-American girl.”[[492]](#footnote-492) Her “good Southern femininity” was effectively “sull[ied],”[[493]](#footnote-493) her “identity” “spoil[t],”[[494]](#footnote-494) and her innocent white girlhood corrupted by madness, which then offered an opening for society at large to apply moralistic narratives to every aspect of her life. Jijian Voronka, however, reads Spears’ haircut as “an embodied sign of protest”[[495]](#footnote-495) against the idealized femininity she was made to perform. This ‘embodied protest’ threw Western society’s expectations of Spears’ life journey into peril. Indeed, her *Rolling Stone* cover shoot demonstrates how Spears once “embodie[d] the [feminine] citizen as an ideal,”[[496]](#footnote-496) ripe for male consumption and heteronormative reproduction that “intends to restore an Imaginary past.”[[497]](#footnote-497) In reality, this image of Spears was manufactured “for the satisfaction of adults, an Imaginary fullness that’s considered to want, and therefore to want for, nothing.”[[498]](#footnote-498) When Spears refused to conform to normative white femininity and began to embody mad femininity, she was labelled nonsensical, unable to care for herself, and she was ultimately set up in a patriarchal conservatorship that allowed for financial and emotional abuse. As a producer, Jenny Eliscu, from *Britney vs. Spears* reads from a document in Spears’ court case, “[Britney’s] […] preoccupation was whether the conservatorship would end and whether her father, Jamie Spears, would be more lenient with her privileges.”[[499]](#footnote-499) Eliscu then turns to the director, Erin Lee Carr, and responds, “Oh man. She gets an allowance, she’s got ‘privileges,’ and her daddy is in charge.”[[500]](#footnote-500)

It is only now that this patriarchal policing of feminine madness that is evidenced in the problematic dynamic between Britney Spears and her father has come to broader societal public awareness. The #FreeBritney movement[[501]](#footnote-501) and the plethora of documentaries on her case have accomplished this; however, I argue, there must be an interrogation of how the mad feminine subject has come to be presented as threatening yet infantile. To present the repercussions of a psychiatric conservatorship without an analysis of the sociocultural conditions that produced this penal structure weakens the chance for repeals of conservatorships used against feminine people.[[502]](#footnote-502) As such, this chapter will interrogate the mad feminine subject using Deleuze’s second series of nonsense. I stated in the introduction that Deleuze’s second series of nonsense describes the dynamics of a threat to the structural integrity of the surface organization:

Is not this secondary organization threatened by a monster even more awesome than the Jabberwocky — by a formless, fathomless nonsense, very different from what we previously encountered in the two figures still inherent in sense? At first, the threat is imperceptible, but a few steps suffice to make us aware of an enlarged crevice; the whole organization of the surface has already disappeared, overturned in a terrible primordial order. Nonsense no longer gives sense, for it has consumed everything. […] [W]e have entered a storm. We might have thought to be still among little girls and children, but we are already in an irreversible madness.[[503]](#footnote-503)

Deleuze goes on to note that this form of nonsense is “an entirely different language” than that of its surface counterpart. Comparing “Carroll’s language and [Antonin] Artaud’s language” reveals the difference between the series of nonsense, as “the former [is] emitted at the surface, the latter [is] carved into the depth of bodies.”[[504]](#footnote-504) We can see that the serial killer, the monster patrolling the surface organization and producing sense via nonsensical madness as aesthetic, is not what causes the collapse of the surface into the depths. Rather than helping to produce sense, this figure of nonsense “erase[s], divert[s], and alienate[s]” sense in order to summon the subject to “rediscover and to restore meaning”[[505]](#footnote-505) existing outside of an intangible limit or, as Deleuze writes, “frontier”; the second series of nonsense, in fact, has no surface:

[t]hings and propositions have no longer any frontier between them, precisely because bodies have no surface. […] As there is no surface, the inside and the outside, the container and the contained, no longer have a precise limit.[[506]](#footnote-506)

In other words, because there is no organizing principle of the surface, there is simply a “language in depth,”[[507]](#footnote-507) a schizoid[[508]](#footnote-508) language that works as both “the actions and the passions of the body.”[[509]](#footnote-509) In this way, language penetrates the body to produce “a pure language-affect.”[[510]](#footnote-510) As such, “the entire world loses its meaning” and “the word loses its sense, that is, its power to draw together or to express an incorporeal effect distinct from the actions and passions of the body.”[[511]](#footnote-511) In other words, the signifier becomes uncoupled from the signified, offering this figure of nonsense the ability to “loa[d] [signs] with affects, and this results in making them ambiguous […] or sometimes nonsensical.”[[512]](#footnote-512) Ultimately, there is no threshold between language and the body in this series of nonsense, and every affect is felt supremely and deeply, a state of being that is usually associated with feminine madness.

As a classic example, I turn to Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, the first play within the *Oresteia*. In this play, Cassandra, the daughter of King Priam of Troy and the war-prize of Agamemnon, is portrayed as a character with what Seth L. Schein calls “‘multi-temporal’ awareness.”[[513]](#footnote-513) She has “prophetic knowledge” that no one believes as “punishment for breaking her agreement with Apollo to have children.”[[514]](#footnote-514) She is described by Clytemnestra as “mad, and obeying wrong thoughts,”[[515]](#footnote-515) as well as by the chorus as “a wild animal [that is] just captured.”[[516]](#footnote-516) After singing some of her anxieties, the chorus “liken[s] this [her prophecies] to some evil,”[[517]](#footnote-517) and calls Cassandra “someone demented, possessed.”[[518]](#footnote-518) Cassandra, previously offering prophecies via riddles in song, attempts to “no longer instruct you [the chorus] from riddles,”[[519]](#footnote-519) and dares them to label her “a babbler,”[[520]](#footnote-520) essentially challenging the chorus to characterize her as a mad woman speaking nonsense; however, in a prophecy, she clearly states, “I say that you will look upon the death of Agamemnon,”[[521]](#footnote-521) to which the chorus replies, “Still your tongue, you wretched woman!”[[522]](#footnote-522) This scene is remarkably twofold: it stands as an example of how mad femininity is treated within Western(ized) patriarchal narratives, as the chorus compromises Athenian citizens, and therefore, men, as women could not be citizens; and the stage actions in this scene depict Cassandra as unable to control her emotional responses, and therefore characterize her as unreasonable and hysterical. For example, she “burst[s] into cries of anguish and sing[s] wildly.”[[523]](#footnote-523) Oscillating between singing and becoming “suddenly calm,”[[524]](#footnote-524) which stands in stark comparison to the chorus, which has no stage direction, but responds to Cassandra’s prophecies with “the same awe, horror, and pity” that “schizophrenics” evoke, “who often combine deep, true insight with utter helplessness, and who retreat radically into madness.”[[525]](#footnote-525) This staging, Schein suggests, along with this scene’s language and structure, help the audience “to make sense”[[526]](#footnote-526) of the previous events in the play, as well as the drama the audience will eventually see later. Indeed, Cassandra “helps to bring the audience — and the reader of the play — out of the bewilderment and confusion established in the first *c.* 1000 lines.”[[527]](#footnote-527) Although the audience is able to take Cassandra’s nonsense and make sense of the rest of the play through it, suggesting that it is in the first series of nonsense, it is indicative of the second series if we undertake a feminist reading, and choose to centre Cassandra’s experience. In other words, Cassandra’s prophecies of death, including her own, considered nonsensically mad by Clytemnestra and the chorus, explicate how words in this second series “act directly on the body, penetrating and bruising it”[[528]](#footnote-528); her singing represents the “unbearable sonorous qualities [that] invade the body.”[[529]](#footnote-529) She works within a “second language” that “transform[s] the word into an action by rendering it incapable of being decomposed,” of “disintegrating” into the air after the actual act of articulation.[[530]](#footnote-530) The nonsensically mad prophecies have a profound effect on her material experience and emotions, “immediately affect[ing] [her] body.”[[531]](#footnote-531)

In comparison, the Furies that plague Orestes in *Eumenides* are three primitive feminine gods connected to witchcraft who carry out irrational forms of vengeance that are ultimately defeated through Apollo’s reasonability, thus re-establishing male order. In the third play of the *Oresteia* trilogy, the Furies attempt to enact vengeance on Orestes for matricide. Summoned by Clytemnestra’s ghost, the Furies are directed to “[w]aft [their] bloody breath at the man [Orestes], within him with its blast, the fire from your belly.”[[532]](#footnote-532) Orestes takes shelter in Apollo’s temple, a spatial domain of reason from which the Furies are soon ejected. Apollo declares,

Out of this temple, I command you! On your way quickly, take yourselves off from this inner place of prophecy, so you receive no winged and flashing shaft sped from my golden bowstring, and under the pain bring up a dark froth from your lungs, vomiting the clots of blood you drew off! It is quite improper that you approach this temple — go rather where justice is decapitation and gouged-out eyes, and slaughtered throats [...].[[533]](#footnote-533)

In this excerpt, Apollo ejects the Furies from his masculine domain of reason, and characterizes the Furies as feminine and monstrous, typified as repulsive representations of feminine madness. This disgusting trio is configured as primitive elemental powers that, when juxtaposed against Apollo as a male authority figure — the god of beauty, art, and logic — clearly embody the irrational wrath of women, further evidenced in their attempts to avenge the enraged ghost of Clytemnestra. Apollo defends Orestes’ crime of matricide from the Furies in court to the judge, Athena, and ultimately wins. This judicial acquittal represents not only man’s mastery over the environment, a feminized element, through reason, but also the triumph of the rational over the emotional, a clear hermeneutic gender binary that is evidenced in the Furies’ singing, “[T]his is our song: derangement, distraction, ruination of the mind.”[[534]](#footnote-534) They are described in the stage directions similarly to Cassandra, as they “break into excited and irregular song.”[[535]](#footnote-535) Their movements demonstrate the effect that feminine rage and madness have on their material bodies.

Sigmund Freud wrote about and practiced on mad people, particularly women, to prove his many theories on the origin and nature of subjectivity. While many of Freud’s theories have evolved to benefit feminist ideas and philosophies, such as his theories on the unconscious and his radical yet restrictive notions that break sexual development away from biological determinism, his overall characterizations of madness, especially mad women, have echoed extensively with harmful effects, such as the legitimization of removing agency from mad people. Borossa writes, “Freud’s encounter with hysteria and the hysterical patient lies at the very origin of psychoanalysis,” as hysteria’s unique “ability to symbolise conflict and distress in a kind of alternate language”[[536]](#footnote-536) was believed to offer an unimpeded window into the unconscious. As such, I turn to Freud’s famous psychoanalytic evaluation and diagnosis of Dora as an interpretation of hysterical madness through the gaze of reason. I intend to read and consider beyond Freud’s reading of Dora’s expressions of nonsense and madness to imagine her hysteria as a site of radical potentiality, rather than a space of fearsome, unreasonable non-meaning, in order to introduce Deleuze’s second series of nonsense.

Dora was a “child of fourteen” whose “behaviour […] was already entirely and completely hysterical.”[[537]](#footnote-537) After hearing Dora’s case, in which her father’s best friend kissed her, Freud diagnoses her as expressing hysterical behaviour due to an unconscious desire for her father’s best friend. This diagnosis is then layered on top of her own supposed desire for her father, only to leave Dora with a mess of half-baked, sexist analyses; however, he does demonstrate an outlook on meaning different from his contemporaries that is worth exploring. In his thoughts on his sessions with Dora, he remarks on the temporal quality of meaning, as he argues that “the capacity for repeating itself is one of the characteristics of a hysterical symptom […] that has a psychical signification, a *meaning*” that is “welded on to it” at “every instance”[[538]](#footnote-538) of expression. In this way, Freud theorizes the actual *act* *of articulation* as void of pre-determined meaning, proposing an instability of meaning that is present and absent in the symptom and/or articulation. Indeed, Freud writes, “According to a rule which I had found confirmed over and over again by experience, […] at least *one* of the meanings of a symptom is the representation of a sexual phantasy, but […] no such limitation is imposed upon the content of its other meanings.”[[539]](#footnote-539) He continues on, “[A] symptom has more than one meaning and serves to represent several unconscious mental processes simultaneously.”[[540]](#footnote-540)

Unfortunately, Freud reads Dora’s articulation of madness toward a discursively formed opinion indicative of the power dynamics of the time period: “I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable.”[[541]](#footnote-541) Freud evidently endeavours to make “sense of [the] occurrence,” offering a “potentiality” that establishes a “possible wa[y] in which [Dora] might [have] relate[d] to a situation.”[[542]](#footnote-542) While Freud nods to these alternate paths, suggesting, “[I]n every instance [of a hysterical symptom] the meaning can be a different one, according to the nature of the suppressed thoughts which are struggling for expression,”[[543]](#footnote-543) he opts for a violent reading of Dora’s expressions of hysteria, going so far as to suggest that she will continue on in life to use her “ill-health” as “her one weapon for maintaining her position.”[[544]](#footnote-544) Freud’s reading of malingering clearly demonstrates the masculine rationalist assumptions imposed upon ill feminine bodies. Remarkably, though, he does note that, due to the potential of different meanings, his reading of her hysteria “is therefore not its truth.”[[545]](#footnote-545) It is important to note, though, that his social position worked to naturalize his reading of Dora into her “truth,” and consequently into a hegemonic hermeneutic process of reading mad women’s bodies.

## **Reading and Interpreting Mad Femininity**

One of the main priorities of this chapter is to consider how readers can engage in reading-projects that do not force particular readings according to sociopolitical agendas that use patriarchal hermeneutic tools, such as the Julia Kristeva’s division between semiotic and symbolic orders, and their connection to the abject. Barbara Creed takes Kristeva’s concept and applies it to horror films that depict the ‘monstrous-feminine’; Creed notes that women have “a special relationship to the abject.”[[546]](#footnote-546) In fact, the abject is feminized, “exist[ing] in opposition to the paternal symbolic, which is governed by rules and laws.”[[547]](#footnote-547) Creed continues, “In order to enter the symbolic order,” which consists of, essentially, the governing structures of language and society, “the subject must reject or repress all forms of behaviour, speech and modes of being regarded as unacceptable, improper or unclean.”[[548]](#footnote-548) As such, the

semiotic chora of language which finds expression in non-rational discourses” must be repressed, although its existence “challenges the rational discourse of the symbolic order and the seeming stability of the rational subject.[[549]](#footnote-549)

Entering into greater society more macrocosmically, or a reading-project microcosmically, requires a repression of the feminine, the nonsensical, and the illogical. In this way, the production of significance is restricted to that which is considered acceptable, proper, and sanitized[[550]](#footnote-550) according to logo- and phallocentric ideologies. This hermeneutic dynamic is one of the problematic elements in Freud’s reading of Dora, spectators’ engagement with horror movies featuring monstrous feminine characters, and, I contend, how we as readers engage with mad femininity.

As I move into a reading of two novels that I will use to encourage a mad hermeneutics, I want to foreground Dora’s reality, which the fictional characters in Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Donoghue’s *The Wonder*: akin to Dora, these characterssuffer at the hands of men imposing their readings of their subjectivities on them. Indeed, the men throughout *Surfacing* are carriers of logocentric ideologies, insisting that their perspectives are “reality,”[[551]](#footnote-551) a clear assumption of universal objectivity that holds patriarchal undercurrents. Beyond Joe, the narrator’s partner, and David, one of the men on the trip with them, the narrator describes her brother as making up excuses “in advance of the transgressions; that’s the logical way,”[[552]](#footnote-552) something that the narrator declines to do. Comparing herself to her brother’s “logical” behaviour, she calls herself “stupid,” and explains, “[S]tupidity is the same as evil if you judge by the results.”[[553]](#footnote-553) Clearly, men and their logocentric ideologies are positioned as oppositional to women’s inherent immorality and irrationality in a gender binary that “link[s] dominant Western forms of feminism and rationality with male power and control over women and nature, a power which is associated with violence, oppression and destruction.”[[554]](#footnote-554) This gender binary equates innocence, the land, and madness with femininity and exploitation, violence, and logic with masculinity, standing as the main metaphoric foundation of the text, from which Atwood builds a critique of America, weapons, and medical violation.

Importantto this chapter is the ways in which the male characters employ logocentric-based perspectives to conduct what are, essentially, patriarchal hermeneutic projects that attempt to extract meaning from the female characters’ bodies, words, and affects, accomplished through the male gaze. Joe and David objectify and “emphasize [the female characters’] status as sexual beings or maternal figures”[[555]](#footnote-555) through their use of a camera throughout the novel. Joe and David are “making a movie, Joe is doing the camera work,” and David “calls himself the director.”[[556]](#footnote-556) The narrator explains that David “wants to get shots of things they come across, random samples he calls them,” which he will then “rearrange” after their “collect[ion].”[[557]](#footnote-557) Indeed, this film stands as an actualized male gaze, in which the masculine objective viewpoint orders and rearranges the world as deemed fit via their “invisible captured images.”[[558]](#footnote-558) Through this film, David and Joe are given control over the women’s bodies, as evidenced by David verbally and physically assaulting Anna, his wife, in an attempt to film her naked.[[559]](#footnote-559) In this scene, in which Anna is forced to strip naked in front of Joe, David, and their camera while the narrator watches from afar, “the camera is used as a tool of voyeurism and sadism, disempowering those before its gaze.”[[560]](#footnote-560) Anna, then, through this interaction is read and given meaning as a “pair of boobs”[[561]](#footnote-561) by the objective male gaze, effectively dehumanizing her by cutting her body into pieces, an image that is ratified in the narrator’s description of viewing her through the trees, in which she “saw [Anna] cut in half, one breast on either side of a thin tree.”[[562]](#footnote-562) The separation of women from their bodies is found throughout the text, such as when the narrator stumbles upon some drawings of women’s bodies while playing with her brother in a cabin as a child. The narrator recalls, “I was shocked, not by those parts of the body, […] but that they should be cut off like that from the bodies that ought to have gone with them.”[[563]](#footnote-563)

The patriarchal expectations through which the women in *Surfacing* are read constantly shift, so that Anna is objectified under the male gaze but then derided for her lack of intelligence, an imposition of patriarchal logic that effectively distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable feminine behavior. As outlined by Anna’s appraisal of David’s “little set of rules” that “he keeps changing,”[[564]](#footnote-564) women are only allowed to act within a carefully managed range of acceptable behaviours, which are constantly shifting. To step outside of this range is to risk punishment. As Anna tells the narrator, “If I break one of them I get punished” by either not “screw[ing] at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts.”[[565]](#footnote-565) Furthermore, David derides Anna for not “look[ing] like a young chick all the time,” and if she doesn’t use make-up, then “he gets mad”; however, when Anna feigns innocence and a lack of knowledge akin to a child, David ridicules her as “dumb.”[[566]](#footnote-566) In a similar dynamic, when Anna attempts to utilize her body as “her only weapon” through which she “fight[s] for her life,” she is labelled as “desperate.”[[567]](#footnote-567) The misogynist and unreachable expectations of women are also imposed upon the narrator, as her partner, Joe, “prefer[s] it if [she] kept from showing any reaction, no matter what has happened”[[568]](#footnote-568); however, when the narrator does not display just enough emotion to match Joe’s expectations, he “seems worried. Perhaps he’s been expecting [the narrator] to have hysterics and he’s anxious because [she is] not having any.”[[569]](#footnote-569) Eventually, the shifting rules of acceptable behaviour and affect that the narrator experiences and witnesses by watching Anna and David converse drive the narrator ‘mad,’ leading her to act “according to rules that make no ‘sense’ and are contrary to those of our culture.”[[570]](#footnote-570)

This spatialization of nonsense in *Surfacing* is only possible due to histories that are “sedimented” and maintained over the course of multiple generations, such as the histories of misogynistic exploitation that become “sediment[ed]”[[571]](#footnote-571) in Anna’s body. Of course, *Surfacing* stands as an ecofeminist text in which the landscape and feminine bodies are equated throughout, so that the meaning of the land is also read by patriarchal institutions to various ends. At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator, her partner, Joe, and their two friends, David and Anna, are driving through northern Quebec. On their journey, they pass what “looks like an innocent hill,” but was actually “the pit the Americans hollowed out” for “the rockets.”[[572]](#footnote-572) While this is the first mention of Americans, it certainly is not the last; Americans are woven into *Surfacing*’s narrative as oppositional to Canadians, an example of the gender binary that Atwood employs throughout the text. he Americans that visit Quebec effectively stand as a metaphor for the exploitation of the land and women’s bodies, as evidenced in the assertion the narrator makes upon the loss of her name and performative “civili[ty]”[[573]](#footnote-573): “they [Anna, David, and Joe] are all Americans now.”[[574]](#footnote-574) These two entities, land and womanhood, are equated in this ecofeminist text. In fact, the hill is described as “innocent,” a descriptor that is often socio-politically deployed in reproductive futurist discourses to describe a trait of idealized young womanhood. Thus, describing the hill as “innocent” mirrors Western idealized femininity, and the supposed corruption that occurs at the hands of exploitative sources, be that the American military industrial complex that decimates land for the purpose of missile silos, or patriarchal institutions that determine the boundaries of acceptable feminine subjectivity.

The narrator seems to ‘go off the deep end’ quite literally, as she learns to embrace vertical movement, framed as oppositional to the masculine horizontal movement depicted throughout the text. In other words, the narrator’s shift into madness has a spatial dimension that is reflected in Deleuze’s taxonomy of nonsense: while the first series of nonsense works to produce sense and maintain the surface organization, his second series requires “div[ing] into nonsense,”[[575]](#footnote-575) a vertical movement that “submerge[s]” a body in the nonsensical depth so that it “become[s] the space [it] inhabit[s].”[[576]](#footnote-576) This vertical movement is referenced multiple times within the binaric framework of gender, as the narrator remembers how the Americans “g[e]t drunk and chas[e] loons in their powerboats for fun, backtracking on the loon as it dived, not giving it a chance to fly, until it drowned or got chopped up in the propeller blades.”[[577]](#footnote-577) While the narrator describes this instance of the destruction of animals and the landscape as an exercise in neoliberal capitalist power, it is clear that it is also a “violation” inflicted for misogynistic pleasure akin to the exploitation of Anna. To put this excerpt into the context of Deleuzian nonsense, the Americans physically and metaphorically produce sense as a “surface effect,” despite the narrator labelling this as “[s]enseless killing, it was a game.”[[578]](#footnote-578) I argue that the Americans actually enact a sense typical of neoliberal capitalism as they sail upon the surface of the lake: the land is exploitable for any man’s purpose, and thus, according to the ecofeminist logic that equates femininity with land, women are exploitable for any man’s purpose. As the narrator notes, “[I]f it’s running around loose, ownerless, why not take it,”[[579]](#footnote-579) a capitalist grammar of ownership over the land that “won’t let you have peace.”[[580]](#footnote-580) The loon attempts to move vertically, flying up or sinking below to escape the vicious Americans, but is unable to escape as it is caught in the wake of the boat or its propellers split it apart.

This excerpt about the demise of the loon at the hands of the Americans is indicative of the entire dynamic of nonsensical feminine madness in this text, in which women are split from the rest of their bodies by the male gaze, and are only able to escape this objectification through vertical movements. The climax of *Surfacing* depicts the narrator taking a canoe out on the lake and diving in deep, dark water to find her father’s body. This scene in the novel features the narrator experiencing the return of a repressed memory, which then acts as a turning point. After, she begins to embrace the “irreversible”[[581]](#footnote-581) feminine madness. The narrator dives into the lake from a canoe, searching for her father’s body in the water, only returning to the surface for air. She thinks she sees the body, and “plunge[s]”:

Pale green, then darkness, layer after layer, deeper than before, seabottom; the water seemed to have thickened […], and I saw they were fish, the chasm-dwellers, fins lined with phosphorescent sparks, teeth neon. It was wonderful that I was down so far, I watched the fish, they swam like patterns on closed eyes, my legs and arms were weightless, free-floating […]. It was there but it wasn’t a painting, it wasn’t on the rock. It was below me, drifting towards me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limbs. It was blurred but it had eyes, they were open, it was something I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead.[[582]](#footnote-582)

From this passage, we can read the narrator diving into the abyss of madness, a feminine space of nonsense that she inhabits and that shapes her body. Indeed, as she sinks underwater, “layer after layer,” the narrator is able to fully re-cognize her repressed memories of her forced abortion; the mentions of “chasm-dwellers” and bioluminscent fish associated with deep water act as metaphors for the narrator’s repression. It is notable that it is only after the narrator seems to merge with the water, becoming “weightless” and “free-floating” that she notices the “dead thing.” While the narrator was searching the lake for her father’s body, and thus readers can reasonably assume the “dead thing” is her father, I read the “dark oval trailing limbs” alternatively, as the fetus from her repressed memory, which she could only interact with underwater. On land, the narrator is separated from any other form of articulation and language, often experiencing “the strangling feeling, paralysis of the throat.”[[583]](#footnote-583) Underwater, however, the narrator’s words are transfigured into “an action by rendering it incapable of being decomposed and incapable of disintegrating: *language without articulation*.”[[584]](#footnote-584) In other words, rather than being split apart from her body via the male gaze and logocentric ideologies, the narrator, when underwater, is able to “unite body and feeling” through behavior deemed ‘mad.’[[585]](#footnote-585)

The narrator’s madness is elaborated upon more via her transformation into a *loup-garou,* or a werewolf whose origins lie in Québécois folklore, coming to embody a struggle over mad feminine meaning into which she is interpellated by her male travelling companions. The *loup-garou* stands as a threat to errant Québécois Catholics who “don’t go to Mass.”[[586]](#footnote-586) In fact, Laurence Harf-Lancner connects this mythic creature to the apologetic literature of the 15th century. In particular, he reads mentions of metamorphosis in St. Augustine’s *City of God* to connect the phenomenon to demons. St. Augustine suggested that metamorphosis falls under two “registers,” that of the devil, and that of “unreality,”[[587]](#footnote-587) an argument that reveals the essence of beliefs about human-to-animal transfiguration in the Middle Ages. Essentially, St. Augustine alleged that it was demons that held the power to transform people into animals, and, in order to assert God’s power over humans, used the notion of the *phantasticum hominis*, effectively subverting the concept of the “diabolical illusion”[[588]](#footnote-588) inherent in metamorphosis. St. Augustine argued that the *phantasticum* is the representation of the self in a dream, which has no “bodily reality,”[[589]](#footnote-589) and exists independently of the dream. This *phantasticum* is what is susceptible to demons, and not the corporeal. As such, metamorphosis, in St. Augustine’s philosophies, strongly resembles a doubling of the self, so that the transformation does not affect the body or “reasoning” mind — solely the *phantasticum*;the metamorphosis as a potentially corporeal state located in reality is rejected, and effectively refuses the “primary significance of werewolf tales,” in which there is a “conjugal presence, in every being, of man and wolf.”[[590]](#footnote-590)

I am inclined to believe that the narrator of Atwood’s *Surfacing* follows a transfiguration in line with St. Augustine’s conceptualization of werewolves, in which the narrator does not materially transform, but where the representation of herself *to* herself is altered. Indeed, upon her metamorphosis and the arrival of Americans near the cottage’s dock, the narrator deems the Americans untrustworthy, because “[t]hey’ll mistake [her] for a human being, a naked woman wrapped in a blanket,”[[591]](#footnote-591) suggesting that her physical appearance is not altered to an animal state. Furthermore, she notes that the Americans “won’t be able to tell what [she] really [is],” because they cannot see her “true form,”[[592]](#footnote-592) that of an animal, indicated in the way that she equates her potential death at the hands of Americans to their murder and disposal of a heron earlier in the book. Ultimately, the narrator fears “the hospital or the zoo,” two “real danger[s]”[[593]](#footnote-593) that would involve her incarceration due to her madness and/or her animal transformation. Looking in a mirror, the narrator finds

a creature neither animal nor human, furless, only a dirty blanket, shoulders huddled over into a crouch, eyes staring blue as ice from the deep sockets; the lips move by themselves. This was the stereotype, straws in the hair, talking nonsense or not talking at all. To have someone to speak to and words that can be understood: their definition of sanity.”[[594]](#footnote-594)

Remarkably, in this excerpt, the narrator draws attention to how she anticipates her body and behaviour will be read, which is as a stereotypical, nonsensically mad woman. Since she does not articulate herself in a way “that can be understood,” she is, by hegemonic Western patriarchal definitions, a mad woman. This quote confirms that the narrator forsakes Western rationalist structures of logocentrism for an embodied and affective articulation of madness, a narrative arc that begins at the beginning of the text and is slowly revealed toward the end. For example, the abortion that the narrator is forced to go through is, by her description, “logical, pure logic,”[[595]](#footnote-595) a procedure that her partner pushes her into after telling her that the fetus “wasn’t a person, only an animal.”[[596]](#footnote-596) Men are further aligned with logocentric patriarchy through the description of David’s eyes “gleam[ing] like test tubes.”[[597]](#footnote-597) The narrator thus turns inward, as “madness is private,”[[598]](#footnote-598) and refuses to present herself in public, as “[f]rom any rational point of view [she is] absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view.”[[599]](#footnote-599) In this, the narrator distances herself from society, as her madness is “too messy and wild to really fit into traditional movement and nonprofit industrial complex structures, because [her] bod[y] and min[d] [is] too wild to fit into those structures.”[[600]](#footnote-600) Akin to how the chorus designates Cassandra as “wild,”[[601]](#footnote-601) the narrator is similarly unable to fit into rationalist hermeneutic structures due to her “ephemeral wildness [that] sweeps order away”[[602]](#footnote-602): feminine madness.

*The Wonder* also features an extensive narrative arc that explores feminine madness, and particularly in relation to the beginnings of the medical industrial complex. The story begins with Lib, a woman who has a deeply intimate relationship with grief, as she has “lost so much already.”[[603]](#footnote-603) The reader is introduced to her trauma halfway through the book, in which it is revealed that she lost a child during birth, a passing that she shares in common with the narrator of *Surfacing*. [[604]](#footnote-604) She is a student of Florence Nightingale, and, upon returning from Crimea, is assigned to monitor a young Irish girl who insists she can live without food. Upon receiving her assignment, she is told that the girl is “not exactly ill. [Her] only duty will be to watch her [the child],” which Lib connects to “[t]hat awful nurse in *Jane Eyre,* charged with keeping the lunatic hidden away in the attic.”[[605]](#footnote-605) The young girl, Anna, is eventually diagnosed by a doctor as experiencing “a simple case of hysteria.”[[606]](#footnote-606) Lib thinks through this diagnosis as “[a]n obsession, a mania [...]. A sickness of the mind”[[607]](#footnote-607) that makes her want to “sh[ake] the girl awake [...] and sa[y], *Come to your senses*!”[[608]](#footnote-608) However, Lib concedes “that was part of the definition of madness,” [...] the refusal to accept that one was mad.”[[609]](#footnote-609) Lib evaluates Anna as having many “dearly held, mad notions”[[610]](#footnote-610) that are akin to Irish preoccupations with “fair nonsense,”[[611]](#footnote-611) a clear correlation between madness and fantastical magic that also, in the use of the word “fair,” labels this type of nonsense legitimate, perhaps due to its association with religion and folklore. Indeed, there are many mentions of nonsense in relation to Anna’s supposed madness, such as Lib chalking up her “ambition” to live “free of appetite”[[612]](#footnote-612) to Irish-Catholicism “fill[ing] her [Anna’s] head with morbid nonsense,”[[613]](#footnote-613) but only some of this nonsense is considered legitimate, or “fair.” Anna’s mother even berates Lib for telling her husband “this nonsense about her [Anna] being in grave danger,”[[614]](#footnote-614) suggesting that truth, “whatever the truth may be,”[[615]](#footnote-615) is in fact quite arbitrary and interpreted differently. The malleability of objectivity and truth is referenced metaphorically through a gift that Anna receives, called a thaumatrope, which, when the two strings are pulled, blurs two pictures into one. Anna notes that the bird “is in the cage now,” which her visitor calls, “mere illusion.”[[616]](#footnote-616)

Indeed, this gift stands as a metaphor for Anna’s narrative, in which she asserts that she can live without food but appears to be wasting away by medical standards, because she “wanted to leave her body, drop it like an old coat. To shed her creased skin, her name, her broken history; to be done with it all.”[[617]](#footnote-617) Lib soon discovers that Anna was a victim of incestuous rape at the hands of her dying brother, a fact which Lib refuses to investigate

through the violation of medical examination. [...] Besides, even if the fact could be proved, what Lib saw as incestuous rape, others would call seduction. Wasn’t it so often the girl — no matter how young — who got blamed for having incited her molester with a look?[[618]](#footnote-618)

So, the thaumatrope follows a dialectic logic, blurring two supposedly antithetical images together to produce many narratives for Anna. This is demonstrated twofold: firstly, despite Lib’s co-worker, Sister Michael, insisting on Cartesian dualism, that there is a separation between mind and body,[[619]](#footnote-619) Anna’s fasting (body) combines with her trauma (mind) to produce a devastating, ever-evolving narrative labeled as ‘mad’; and secondly, this embodied feminine madness combines with patriarchal medical diagnoses and tests to produce an assumed lack of signification. As Lib narrates, “Fate was faceless, life arbitrary, *a tale told by an idiot,*”[[620]](#footnote-620) clearly alluding to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, and indicating a lack of confidence in the coherence of the narrative imposed on both her life and Anna’s life. In *Metaphors We Live By,* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson note the difference between conventional and unconventional metaphors: If someone asks you to tell your life story, which is a conventional metaphor you “see yourself telling the truth if you do [...] view the highlighted participants and events as the significant ones and do [...] perceive them as fitting together coherently.”[[621]](#footnote-621) Here, the coherence of your narrative must match the coherence of your life in order to be measured as truthful. In comparison, the unconventional metaphor does not offer the possibility of coherence, because stories told by idiots are not coherent, even if “[t]hey start off as if they were coherent stories [...]. [T]hey suddenly shift over and over again, making it impossible to find coherence as you go along or any coherence overall.”[[622]](#footnote-622) The authors argue that this telling of a life story offers “no way of providing meaning or significance to our lives.”[[623]](#footnote-623) Of course, as any self-respecting English student can reiterate, the end of Shakespeare’s metaphor already negates any possibility of meaning, instead suggesting “that the episodes cannot be viewed [...] in some coherent whole.”[[624]](#footnote-624) This metaphor, though, may suit the purposes of people who have experienced trauma, madness, or unexpected, troubling circumstances. “[W]e are constantly functioning under the expectation of being able to fit our lives into some coherent life story,” Lakoff and Johnson write, but the reality is that some of the most significant moments in life, “those full of sound and fury,” will not fit into normative language and narratives, so they “therefore, signify nothing.”[[625]](#footnote-625) The girlhood hysteria that Anna is diagnosed with, then, is assumed to indicate and mean nothing, when, in reality, she is experiencing a complex, embodied madness of the Deleuzian second series: her madness is always already complex and embodied due to the socio-historical codes that mediate her affective experience of her own body.

These codes that assume insignificance in girlhood hysteria are situated in a history of how “girls’ protest is often ridiculed, shunned, or belittled,” and “[a]t times it is deemed irrational” and “insane.”[[626]](#footnote-626) In response, Elina Oinas writes, “So what if it is irrational?”[[627]](#footnote-627) Irrationality is exactly what the protest deploys to mitigate “limiting, oppressive rationality.”[[628]](#footnote-628) Girlhood protest is crucial, though, and is a social action that is deeply embedded in the hermeneutic processes of “socially intelligible meaning-making.”[[629]](#footnote-629) Girls, uniquely, are socially disciplined for “societal coherence”[[630]](#footnote-630) and therefore, according to Lakoff and Johnson, public meaning. Oinas contends, “In order to maintain the disciplined girl as a key symbol of social order, the most effective organizing principle that will keep her on a tight rein is the shame and ridicule attached to unruly girls.”[[631]](#footnote-631) Indeed, Anna’s virginal girlhood is maintained through the shame she takes on as a survivor of incestuous sexual assault, leading her to re-present herself as a pious figure worthy of worship. Shame, in this example, acts as not only an “overwhelming” and “interruptive force [that] has been closely tied to the paralysis and inactivity likely in melancholia and depression,”[[632]](#footnote-632) but also a productive force that is formative to constructing self identity. As Jennifer Biddle writes, “The double movement of shame, it seems to me, is critical, at once producing the very possibility of self identity and destabilising it in the process.”[[633]](#footnote-633) In other words, shame helps differentiate the self from the other while the self also, ambivalently, desires the other. Biddle continues, “[S]hame arises as an impossible and yet necessary imperative of the continuously emergent self, bound to the very other it is equally bound to fail in order for its very identity.”[[634]](#footnote-634) Anna’s shame at unwillingly crossing the incest taboo produces her self as a ‘fasting girl,’ in which she is differentiated from humanity as a religious figure that is then read by masculine medical professionals as hysterical. Thus, Anna experiences that ‘double movement’ of shame in which shame is productive to self-identity via differentiation, but she also clearly desires “to be loved by, and to be like, the parent/other whose identity [she] depends on for [her] own.”[[635]](#footnote-635)

Shame is an affective experience located in the realm of the feminine, as Georges Bataille argues, and is deeply intertwined with feminine displays of madness. He suggests, as summarized by Biddle: “put crudely, human reproduction is dependent upon eroticism, eroticism dependent on shame, and shame, in turn, dependent upon woman.”[[636]](#footnote-636) Thus, feminine people are in a unique position in which shame is implicit to “subjectification and desubjectification” together, “self-loss and self-possession.”[[637]](#footnote-637) This co-existence of shame within feminine people, and, in this context, girls, works as a pedagogical and disciplinary tool to ensure nationalist reproductive futurity.

So, how can we as readers hold space for the complexities of feminine madness? Is it possible to engage in a reading-project with texts about feminine madness without attempting to master their meaning? Indeed, the major preoccupation of this chapter is to find a hermeneutic practice that does not flatten the experience of feminine madness into a “coherent plot.”[[638]](#footnote-638) As Brendan Stone writes, “[t]raditional narrative form” relies upon reason, “order[,] and sequence” to “produc[e] meaning.”[[639]](#footnote-639) In comparison, he states, madness is “constructed by its very *difference* from reason, and also [...] by its variance from the readable forms of narrative.”[[640]](#footnote-640) In other words, the “being-stat[e]” of madness does not “fit well with narrative’s drive to organize and arrange experience.”[[641]](#footnote-641) This incongruity is one of the major problems of articulating madness through narrative: while reason is coherent and easily understandable, madness “is characterized variously by fragmentation, amorphousness, entropy, chaos, silence, *senselessness*.”[[642]](#footnote-642) Stone moves to Sarah Kofman’s concept of *écrire sans pouvoir,* or writing without power. Kofman’s term prods at the possibility of “speak[ing] of madness in such a way that does not do violence to the speaker.”[[643]](#footnote-643) Writing without power is a method of life-writing located in memoir and autobiography that is “capable of undoing the repressive authority and exclusionary mastery in a philosophical tradition that pretends to have conclusive truths.”[[644]](#footnote-644) Stone connects Kofman’s method of autobiographical writing to madness as “writing without power is, [he] think[s], particularly relevant and useful when thinking about the narration of mental distress.”[[645]](#footnote-645) He points to Elizabeth Wurtzel’s *Prozac Nation* (1999) as an example, relating how the “narrative remains unfinalized and open ended, preserving the uncertainty inherent in the [...] experience of madness.”[[646]](#footnote-646) Note that “writing without power” is not antithetical to agency, as “the reclamation of the ‘I,’” the subject that experiences madness, becomes an instance “of praxis, a stage on that path towards a more progressive politics.”[[647]](#footnote-647) Stone concludes that writing without power is not only a creative and hermeneutic practice, but an “an ethical mode of being because it is predicated not on a desire for total understanding, but allows for an excess [...] outside of comprehension.”[[648]](#footnote-648) Crucially, according to Stone, writing without power in an autobiographical genre offers a method through which articulation of madness and the material, affective, and, ultimately, phenomenological are possible.

In comparison, Leigh Gilmore explores the possibility of self-representation in autobiography, which has a tension in its generic capabilities: autobiography “appears to constrain self-representation through its almost legalistic definition of truth telling, its anxiety about invention, and its preference for the literal and verifiable, even in the presence of some ambivalence about those criteria.”[[649]](#footnote-649) Gilmore treats testimonies to trauma as inseparable from autobiography, using Rigoberta Menchú’s memoir as an example, which came under criticism because she wrote as though she witnessed events that she did not necessarily experience; however, Gilmore points out, narrowing the issue to the question of whether or not the author lied erases “the complexity of representing the self in the context of representing trauma.”[[650]](#footnote-650) Similarly, *A Million Little Pieces* author James Frey was subject to what has been described as a “public whupping”[[651]](#footnote-651) by Oprah. As Nan Talese, the senior vice president of Doubleday, the publisher of Frey’s book, which was sold as a memoir, explained on air to Oprah, “A memoir is different from an autobiography. A memoir is an author’s remembrance of a certain period in his life. Now, the responsibility, as far as I am concerned, is: does it strike me as valid? Does it strike me as authentic?”[[652]](#footnote-652) As Gilmore notes, there are major “anxieties about purity and danger,”[[653]](#footnote-653) which complicates autobiography and memoir. These genres do have a “debt to the confession,” which “reveals their structural entanglement with law as a metaphor for authority.”[[654]](#footnote-654) However, the nature of autobiography and memoir dissolve the divide between public and private life. Consequently, these “anxieties about purity and danger,” along with the autobiography’s debt to the judicial confession, “conspire to prevent some self-representational stories from being told at all if they were subjected to a literal truth test.”[[655]](#footnote-655) Thus, evaluating aesthetic texts from these genres according to “certain object measures” works to silence writers who may be enticed by the self-representational nature and agential “corrective readings.”[[656]](#footnote-656)

## **The Potential of Autotheoretical Productions**

The evaluation of objective truth in autobiography and memoir is particularly salient for this discussion, as madness is constructed as oppositional to objectivity, truth, and reason. As such, I turn to autotheory, a praxis or perhaps methodological approach that “innate[ly] troubl[es] [...] dominant epistemologies,” but also offers “approaches to philosophizing and theorizing”[[657]](#footnote-657) that exceed their otherwise generic capabilities as they are deployed in the academy. I find autotheory particularly attractive because of its insistence on subjectivity as representative, and also that it holds a rich and storied history in post-1960s contemporary intersectional feminist and disability studies. Standing as a practice at the junction of autobiography, theory, and fiction, auto-theory

takes the actually lived life as as important critically, and as worthy of reflection and nuanced consideration in relation to critical and creative practices (which include fictionalization), without turning to fiction as a stylistic-legalistic crutch.[[658]](#footnote-658)

This definition has significant implications for debates on author intentionality and their privileged position. Indeed, both Barthes and Foucault rallied against hermeneutic methodologies in literary criticism that take on the intentionality of the author as a necessary facet of interpretation. As Foucault outlines in his lecture, “What is an Author?,” the “author function” occurs through a “complex operation” that “constructs a certain being of reason that we call ‘author.’”[[659]](#footnote-659) Critics attempt to instil a “realistic status”[[660]](#footnote-660) in this being of reason via projections of motive and creativity. Foucault points to the common trend in modern literary criticism to define the author through a “manner” akin to exegesis in the “Christian tradition,” in which a text was “authenticated (or rejected)” through a determination of the author’s holiness.[[661]](#footnote-661) Foucault’s critique refuses to fall into this systemic trap that he calls the “individualization”[[662]](#footnote-662) of the author, which produces the author function because it is, in effect, “a system of ownership.”[[663]](#footnote-663) Notably, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, literary discourses were deemed valuable “only when endowed with the author function.”[[664]](#footnote-664) Foucault’s critique refutes the view that the author is “a real individual,” instead suggesting that the author function “can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects.”[[665]](#footnote-665) Indeed, auto-theory’s engagement with feminist epistemological and hermeneutic practices of reflexivity and poly-citation attempts to decentre the self as author, “supplant[ing] the singular (male) author as genius or inventor [...].”[[666]](#footnote-666) So, rather than focusing on the authoritative intention behind a text, an auto-theoretical hermeneutic practice attempts to co-produce a text’s meaning in order “to make a case that the reader’s [...] lived experience is significant to the ongoing, multidirectional process of citation practices that come to constitute meaning in culture.”[[667]](#footnote-667)

In the introduction to this dissertation (“Responses to Potential Criticisms”), I revealed my anxiety in pairing the work of Gilles Deleuze with mad feminine thinking, particularly due to the patriarchal assumptions of what theory is considered legitimate and valuable in the academy. Indeed, De Lio suggested that the ‘posttheoretical turn’ in the academy has led to a division between what he labels ‘low theory’ and ‘high theory,’ of which autotheory would most definitely fall into the former due to its feminist histories. What De Lio points out, though, in his history of theoretical habits in Euro-Western academic humanities is that ‘low theory’ is not necessarily oppositional to ‘high theory,’ despite what his metaphor presents. In fact, as Fournier writes, “the three big patriarchs of this thing we now call ‘theory’ (with a capital *‘T’* implied, at least in the ‘West’) — namely, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud — all worked in somewhat autotheoretical ways.”[[668]](#footnote-668) This fact complexifies the grounding of autotheory in feminist histories that Fournier takes up, but in a fruitful way: “Pointing out the precursors to autotheory in male-authored philosophy of the continental philosophy canon [...] reveals the need to more sufficiently consider the ways the ‘auto’ figures in even the most seemingly ‘objective’ philosophical texts” that often “dismiss[ed] philosophical work that was more outrightly personal.”[[669]](#footnote-669)

I include feminist conceptualizations of auto-theory as an artistic practice of production in this conversation in order to explore alternative hermeneutic practices for interpreting and reading nonsensical madness that are not focused solely and violently on signification, as psychoanalysis is wont to do. Instead it is interested in the *performative* and *temporal* aspects of meaning, specifically as they relate to methodologies of world-building and manifestations of subjectivity. Auto-theory works upon a foundational recognition of “reiterated speech acts”[[670]](#footnote-670) as significant to subjectivity, a conceptualization of the self “with a well-established feminist genealogy.”[[671]](#footnote-671) From this grounding in performativity, auto-theory relies upon a poststructuralist “approach to the self or ‘I,’”[[672]](#footnote-672) in which meaning follows a deferred, infinite logic; however, in the conceptualization of meaning as both present and absent, there is a “fundamental inter-temporality”[[673]](#footnote-673) assumed within this poststructuralist feminist framework. Mieke Bal, a Dutch writer, filmmaker, and theorist perceives images as always “chang[ing] […] with each act of viewing projected upon it, with time, place, and social circumstance of its subsequent ‘life’ as a work of art,” and therefore “[a]n image, in this sense, will always be in the process of ‘becoming.’”[[674]](#footnote-674) This attentiveness to the effect of temporality and performativity on subjectivity gives auto-theory an important theoretical twist that notions about madness outsideof feminist and cultural theory do not consider. It is in “[t]he habits of reiteration” where “(slow) change”[[675]](#footnote-675) is possible, and in this way, auto-theory “us[es] the body’s experience to develop knowledge,”[[676]](#footnote-676) parallel to, as previously mentioned, the enmeshment of the body with feeling.[[677]](#footnote-677) Indeed, when reading texts that feature elements of feminine madness and nonsense, auto-theory, as a hermeneutic methodology, focuses on performativity, and thus consequently focuses on the performance of the author’s intention: the reading and interpretation that centres meaning within an individual’s continual articulation, performance, or non-normative *praxis* of manifesting meaning.

As Fournier elaborates, auto-theory is founded upon the ‘affective turn’ in cultural studies and feminist theory, which has offered up affect and feelings as legitimate entities through which we can perform criticism. One of the primary theorists and founders of the Public Feelings project, Ann Cvetkovich, contends that this turn towards emotions and affect follows a feminist legacy equating the personal with the political. As she argues, the personal is “enabled, if not also encouraged, by theory’s demand that intellectual claims be grounded in necessarily partial and local positionalities.”[[678]](#footnote-678) Consequently, within this critical trend, theory and affect are not diametrically opposed, and “affective investment can be a starting point for theoretical insight”[[679]](#footnote-679) that blossoms in radically creative, compassionate, and innovative ways.

Grounded in affect, auto-theory, despite its strong theoretical roots, is still relatively new to the field of aesthetics, and almost non-existent in hermeneutics; auto-theory is primarily regarded as a “methodological tool”[[680]](#footnote-680) of contemporary artistic production. For example, Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* is a work of auto-theoretical non-fiction that enmeshes cultural theory and philosophy with her existence as a queer woman, including quotes with citational references in the margins of her text. Her work of auto-theory is particularly relevant to this discussion on nonsense and madness, as *The Argonauts* exceptionally takes up poststructuralist theories and ideas of language and hermeneutics:

Words change depending on who speaks them; there is no cure. The answer isn’t just to introduce new words (*boi, cisgendered, andro-fag*) and then set out to reify their meanings (though obviously there is power and pragmatism here). One must also become alert to the multitude of possible uses, possible contexts, the wings with which each word can fly.[[681]](#footnote-681)

Nelson offers this analysis when writing about her queer relationship, and the special meanings she finds in her deployment of the word “husband” because she actively chooses to “le[t] an individual experience of desire [for her partner] take precedence over a categorical one.”[[682]](#footnote-682) It is thus in her performance of meaning, and the repetition of that performance that re-appropriates and re-signifies the word “husband.” In her book, Nelson includes Judith Butler’s critique of readings of *Gender Trouble*, indicating an attention to the multiplicity of, and potential meanings behind, her use of the term “husband.” Butler writes, “Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms to force them to resignify. This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in.”[[683]](#footnote-683) This conceptualization of performativity recognizes the dynamics of power that Western metaphysical and epistemological structures of interpretation construct in their hierarchization of presence, transcendental perception, and signification. Crucially, though, the reflection “from within”[[684]](#footnote-684) that is articulated yet always deferred is a characteristic of auto-theory that recognizes the restrictions that Western dualist logics of reason/ability places upon the infinite potential of meaning. In the example of *The Argonauts*, Nelson instead offers a dialogic “relationship between [her narrative] and the intellectual reflection.”[[685]](#footnote-685) Auto-theory thus embraces the paradoxical temporal nature of meaning that “must be grasped twice.”[[686]](#footnote-686) This negation of binaric structures is also found in Deleuze’s summary of the Stoics’ philosophies on bodies and time acting upon bodies; Deleuze outlines how time is perceived as both “the living present in bodies which act and are acted upon,” and “an entity infinitely divisible into past and future, and into the incorporeal effects which result from bodies.”[[687]](#footnote-687) In distinguishing the incorporeal as merely an “effect,” Deleuze suggests that the Stoics are able to arrive at the “incorporeal limit”[[688]](#footnote-688) where “that which is most profound is the immediate,” and “the immediate is found in language.”[[689]](#footnote-689) This assumption of profundity in self-present articulations therefore suggests that these performances of the self and the body are always already enmeshed in an “infinitely divisible”[[690]](#footnote-690) temporal schema influenced and changed by the potential of other performances, re/articulations, and meanings that are forever absent and present.

My hypothesis on reading auto-theoretically relies heavily on a poststructuralist reading of *écriture féminine*, which acknowledges the alignment of rationality with the masculine and sees the feminine in forms and aspects of language marginalized or suppressed by rationalism,” such as “the languag[e] of madness”[[691]](#footnote-691); however, as Weedon notes in her critique of radical feminism, simply “revers[ing] the rational-irrational opposition”[[692]](#footnote-692) is not helpful, and an entire overhaul of oppressive binaries is always and obviously ideal. Hélène Cixous, a famous theorist of the *écriture feminine* movement, emphasizes writing over speech, which is typically characterized by phal-logocentrism. In foregrounding writing rather than speech, Cixous never defines “a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain” due to writing’s ability to “surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system.”[[693]](#footnote-693) Similarly, I see performances and articulations of nonsense and madness as radically meaningful in their refusal of hegemonically dualist logics that exclude mad peoples’ claims to their personal experiences. To determine the writing of a mad individual as nonsense is to prevent mad people from “achieving modern personhood.”[[694]](#footnote-694) La Marr Jurelle Bruce points to the implications of hegemonic reason for agency. Quoting Achille Mbembe, who critiques the “exercise of reason [a]s tantamount to the exercise of freedom,”[[695]](#footnote-695) Bruce notes, “If those late-modern critics claim that Reason is requisite for ‘becoming a fully moral agent,’ they also imply the inverse — that unReason entails moral deficiency and ineptitude.”[[696]](#footnote-696) Indeed, “the condition of unReason is commensurate with the condition of unfreedom.”[[697]](#footnote-697) Auto-theoretical readings of nonsense and madness therefore must recognize the cruelty of Western structures of meaning-making, and their respective roles in an infinite stream of meaning. I thus view auto-theory as a potentially fertile ground for producing meaning through a respectful reading-project or at least a conceptualization of the interconnected workings of nonsense and madness. The inter-temporal, poststructuralist nature of auto-theoretical production recognizes a multiplicity of meanings; it conceives of meaning as a performance and dialogue with the viewer/reader. Auto-theoretical reading is a dynamic hermeneutics that demands recognition of the impossible infinity of meaning behind articulations and signifiers. Abandoning what Maurice Merleau-Ponty terms “originary faith”[[698]](#footnote-698) that “the world is what we see”[[699]](#footnote-699) and jumping down the rabbit hole is predicated upon an acknowledgement that,

if we can lose our reference marks *unbeknown to ourselves* we are never sure of *having* them when we think we have them; if we can withdraw from the world of perception without knowing it, [into a dream or into madness,] nothing proves to us that we are ever in it, nor that the observable is ever entirely observable, nor that it is made of another fabric than the dream.[[700]](#footnote-700)

This self-present challenge to hegemonic conceptualizations of temporality and perception locates meaning in performances, (re)articulations, or manifestations of subjectivity, thereby gesturing toward a restoring of agency to mad peoples that have been systematically denied as agential subjects, and those who have experienced the brutal revoking of their subjectivity throughout time.

Of course, it is necessary to note that *écriture féminine* has its own problematics. For example, in *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler critiques Julia Kristeva’s suggestion that the semiotic is the domain of the feminine maternal, and only through poetic language can this gendered position be articulated and reclaimed. As Butler summarizes, Kristeva argues for poetic language as a dissolvent of the “coherent,”[[701]](#footnote-701) or reasonable:

For Kristeva, the unmediated cathexis of female homosexual desire leads unequivocally to psychosis. Hence, one can satisfy this drive only through a series of displacements: the incorporation of maternal identity — that is, by becoming a mother oneself — or through poetic language which manifests obliquely the heterogeneity of drives characteristic of maternal dependency. As the only socially sanctioned and, hence, nonpsychotic displacements for homosexual desire, both maternity and poetry constitute melancholic experiences for women appropriately accultured into heterosexuality.[[702]](#footnote-702)

While the subject, here, may yearn for the cathexis of homosexuality, “the consummation of this desire would lead to the psychotic unraveling of identity,” which assumes that, “for women, heterosexuality and coherent selfhood are indissolubly linked.”[[703]](#footnote-703) This critique is important to my understanding of feminine madness, which assumes the self is always-already ‘unravelled’ prior to any desires or drives.

What is crucial to note about the self-present articulation of auto-theory is that, in direct contrast to Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization of the political, it does not require the witnessing of a hegemonic public in order to be politically significant.[[704]](#footnote-704) As Johanna Hedva notes in “Sick Woman Theory,” “If we take Hannah Arendt’s definition of the political — which is still one of the most dominant in mainstream discourse — as being any action that is performed in public, we must contend with the implications of what [or who] that excludes.”[[705]](#footnote-705) Hedva outlines how Arendt fails to account for the disability divide between public and private space, and her theory on the political thus constructs “a binary between visible and invisible space.”[[706]](#footnote-706) As many disabled and chronically ill people who cannot participate in public acts of activism are already aware, relying on the public to witness one’s activism ultimately “sacrifice[s] whole groups of people, […] banish[ing] them to invisibility and political irrelevance,”[[707]](#footnote-707) an “invisibilization” that “disabled Black and brown creators face […] specific[ally].”[[708]](#footnote-708) To suggest that the public is necessary in order to perform politics is to reify the mixed soup of common affects that homebound, bed-ridden, and non-ambulatory disabled people experience: “We’re used to feeling that our disability experiences are private, embarrassing, and not to be spoken about […].”[[709]](#footnote-709) Hedva points to Judith Butler’s critique of Arendt’s definition of the political in Butler’s 2015 lecture, “Vulnerability and Resistance,” citing the problematics of not “account[ing] for who is allowed in to the public space, of who’s in charge of the public. Or, more specifically, who’s in charge of who gets in.”[[710]](#footnote-710) In response, Hedva wrote and continues to update Sick Woman Theory, which they describe as “an insistence that most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible. Sick Woman Theory redefines existence in a body as something that is primarily and always vulnerable.”[[711]](#footnote-711) They point out that the body and mind are affected by and respond to oppression, and so to centre wellness by default within conceptualizations of the political — and existence more broadly — as a public act is to suggest that “illness [i]s temporary”[[712]](#footnote-712) when it is more a fact of life for many of us.

Thus, I find autotheory promising for those of us who are not always (or ever) able to take up political positions in the public eye. Fournier points out that autotheory is used “to make visible and then theorize experiences of illness, disease, pain, trauma, and grief […] and to connect these experiences to political, social, and structural issues of concern to feminists, including the delegitimization of women’s pain and the interrelatedness of sexual trauma with mysterious, feminized illnesses like fibromyalgia.”[[713]](#footnote-713) What is important to note, though, is that many autotheoretical texts by disabled writers are not framed as memoir or personal essays, but rather as theory that is “generate[d]” via “illness, trauma, and disability.”[[714]](#footnote-714) As a result, there are foundational “positionings such as the hysteric”[[715]](#footnote-715) that are taken into the feminist empirical work of Sick Woman Theory, and autotheory more broadly. In writing “Sick Woman Theory,” Fournier suggests that Hedva “performatively reinhabits [feminist positionings of the hysteric] in a way that is self-reflexive, embodied, and grounded in discourses of theory”[[716]](#footnote-716) that are accessible and centre disability.

## **On/ward**

Sometimes, I feel as though it is overkill to theorize on hysteria and the mad feminine subject when this topic is already so common within so many fields: cultural studies, feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and more. What new perspectives can I possibly bring to concepts repeatedly analyzed and talked about by writers more established than I? What stakes does this research have in the lives of marginalized and vulnerable people?

In actuality, the stakes for mad people, and mad feminine populations in particular, are quite high. As Piepzna-Samarasinha notes, “Being perceived as too much can kill you.”[[717]](#footnote-717) They continue on:

Femmes are stereotyped across the board as “too much”: too loud, too crazy, too emotional, too demanding, too many accessories. [...] Black and brown femmes, trans femmes, and disabled femmes are stereotyped even more as “too much” — automatically seen as angry, crazy, harsh, hysterical.[[718]](#footnote-718)

Piepzna-Samarasinha accurately signals the assumed concentration of affect in feminine bodies that overdetermines these bodies as problematic to the masculine rationalist symbolic order. Furthermore, I remind myself, to be perceived as inadequate in maintaining the supposed feminine inclination towards overwhelming affect results in traumatic medical interventions (as explained earlier in this chapter through the example of Britney Spears), or even death.

Clearly, Western society is founded in so many contradictions that have direct, horrific implications for disabled populations. For example, “the body is a vehicle,”[[719]](#footnote-719) and yet also a representation of one’s identity; it is both “inconsequential and perfectible,”[[720]](#footnote-720) unimportant yet the most interesting part of a person. After a brief consideration of ideology as a producer of “social locations outside of itself,” Tobin Siebers coins the term “the ideology of ability,” which is, in its most basic form, “the preference for ablebodiedness.”[[721]](#footnote-721) As Siebers writes, “It affects nearly all of our judgments, definitions, and values about human beings,” and ultimately “makes us fear disability.”[[722]](#footnote-722) In an attempt to explore disability as an intersectional identity complexly embodied, Siebers reveals how “[s]ome bodies are excluded by dominant social ideologies — which means that these bodies display the workings of ideology and expose it to critique [...].”[[723]](#footnote-723) In other words, “ideologies are embodied, their effects are readable, and must be read, in the construction and history of societies.”[[724]](#footnote-724) The ideologies that ground hegemonic conceptualizations of feminine madness in discourses of trauma, objectification, affective mismanagement, and infantilization (this list is absolutely not exhaustive) *must* be remembered as ideologies that effect change on the bodies of real people, like me; these ideologies are embodied within me, the real people whose stories are included in this dissertation, and the fictionalized characters that I have come to know so well. And, these ideologies produce consequences that can be read within the continual flow of history: Anna’s suffering in front of the camera in *Surfacing*, which acts as a logocentric, masculine gaze of reason that cuts her body into pieces, is mirrored in a letter within *Paul’s Case*, in which the unnamed letter-writer uses a double text to write about viewing the “graphic” videotapes in the courtroom that stand as “accounts of the rapes, torture, murder, dismemberment,” what the letter writer terms “clear images.”[[725]](#footnote-725) Anna is rendered a pornographic plaything and tossed into the river by her husband, while elsewhere in the world, a serial killer dismembers a young girl. These two examples of violence are connected through ideologies of patriarchy, misogyny, and objectification; they are not isolated events, but rather moments in which these ideologies are embodied and exposed to the other characters, the courtroom, and readers.

# **Conclusion**

As I wrote this dissertation over the span of many depressive episodes and occasionally psychotic crises, hospital visits and tearful nights on the floor, wondering if I *should* go to the hospital, a pandemic, and many loves and friendships, I have felt the unflinching comfort of my closest friend: suicide. In her piece for *The Outline,* Anna Borges starts with what appears to be a shocking statement: “I wish there was a nicer way to say this, but I don’t always want to be alive.”[[726]](#footnote-726) She continues on to point out many experiences that I share with her: the surprise and, sometimes, pride at each birthday that comes and goes, marking another year that I did not think I would live to see; the eye-rolls directed at my therapist, who is legally required to evaluate my risk after I disclose that I’ve been thinking about it again; the constant researching to find a new treatment, sometimes in trial stages; the desperate hope to find anything — *anything* — that works; and, ultimately, the secrecy and shame inherent in suicidal ideations. I have come to measure my time in life not in terms of age, but wellness: I was ten years old in 2004, which was a very bad year — one in which I discovered the catharsis of a cold knife on warm veins; thirteen, my first experience with love, made confusing by an angry and vindictive best friend; sixteen, my first manic phase; seventeen and eighteen were bad, bad, very bad; twenty-two was my first hospitalization; I was twenty-five in 2019 and I was okay, on a new medicine regimen; and so on. To be perfectly honest, I never considered the possibility of having a year in which I am fully well, nevermind a span of time in which I genuinely enjoy being alive. If a year is to go well, then it is to be regarded with suspicion as a gearing up for the next episode. In other words, I could never trust myself and my perception of things. Time is a mountain to be conquered, and I am often exhausted, climbing to nowhere.

Borges relates the visceral affective responses to suicide in the news, and points out that the shock, “alarm and urgency in these sentiments gives the impression that suicidality is solely standing on the brink, inches from death, waiting desperately for someone to notice and intervene.” While this experience may be true for some people, it is also worth noting that the acute danger of active ideation overshadows discourses on suicide. Sometimes, suicidal ideation is simply, as Borges writes, “like living in the ocean. Not as sea creatures do, native and equipped with feathery gills to dissolve oxygen [...], but alone, with an expanse of water at all sides.”[[727]](#footnote-727) “When you live in the ocean,” she continues, “treading to stay afloat, you eventually get the feeling that one day, inevitably, there will be nowhere for you to go but down. [...] I know [...] that my legs will exhaust and I will slip beneath the surface, but I don’t want it to be soon.”[[728]](#footnote-728) Borges recommends “curat[ing] your collection of flotation devices”[[729]](#footnote-729) as one of the only coping methods available in the absence of medical interventions. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, medical interventions are, depending on your position, dangerous, traumatizing, and sometimes ineffective.

As I have moved through writing this dissertation, I have gone through many affective responses and experiences. Sometimes, it feels as if there is no hope: I will never make it to “the mythical other side”[[730]](#footnote-730) where I don’t think about dying anymore, and everyone will be stuck in this patriarchal, capitalist society that seeks to abject, interpellate, and/or exploit anyone lying outside of the norm. I am finishing this dissertation during an entirely precedented historical juncture, a pandemic that has exacerbated feelings of burnout, hopelessness, anxiety, and despair as the provincial government offers little to no support for citizens unable to work, pay rent, or contribute to the economic vitality of the country more broadly. As my mother facetiously jokes, “We’re all going to need a lot of therapy when we come out of this pandemic.” I laugh, but find myself wondering what would be discussed in the office of the therapist for the entire social psyche. Would this imaginary therapist take a look at the traumatized global population and recommend cognitive behavioural therapy, locating the problem within our own beliefs about ourselves? Or would this therapist understand that it is not the fault of the individual that one’s government has abandoned them in a time of crisis?

One issue that I have found myself contending with throughout this dissertation is whether madness is necessarily traumatic. There are many thinkers that I have deployed throughout this text that contend with madness as a traumatic experience, an eating away of the brain that renders one a babbling and uncontrollable shell. On the first page of her masterful collection of essays, *The Collected Schizophrenias,* author and Graywolf Prize winner Esmé Weijun Wang writes, “People speak of schizophrenics as though they were dead without being dead, gone in the eyes of those around them.”[[731]](#footnote-731) Including Leigh Gilmore’s reading of autobiography as testimony to trauma, for example, implicates suffering in mad writings. Unpacking the cultural work of the serial killer beside the fictional depictions of mad femininity is a risky move, as it places traumatic murder within the vicinity of sanist, misogynistic legacies, and potentially reinforces stigmas of mad people as dangerous, evil, and possessed. Interrogating nonsense alongside madness can lead to the dismissal of mad signification on the basis of reason. After all, if we cannot find a common language, a bearing we use to navigate unruly significance, how can we connect with others?

La Marr Jurelle Bruce “recognize[s] and reckon[s] with occasions where madness entails pain, danger, terror, degradation, and harm for those who experience it and those in its vicinity,” and yet also “hasten[s] to mention that Reason may entail pain, terror, abjection, and harm, too.”[[732]](#footnote-732) In fact, I would go so far as to say that the unwavering empire of reason is one of the primary sources of pain in my life, and to prioritize madness as the traumatic element is to once again read madness as a “categorically detrimental”[[733]](#footnote-733) element of subjectivity rather than both a “devastating abjection and mighty agency.”[[734]](#footnote-734) I am reminded of a particularly affecting passage in Fournier’s *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, in which she details a performance by David Chariandy, a Black writer of the Caribbean diaspora and professor at Simon Fraser University, at ACCUTE 2019. She writes of his performance, “The character, a young Black man and a perceptive student of literature and theory, exercises until he pukes, studies until it’s time to sleep, every day, the rigor of his self-scheduling to attain the ‘success’ of climbing academia’s ladder [...]. Theory, here, is enmeshed in pain.”[[735]](#footnote-735) The academy, a bastion of reason and rationality, offers knowledge to the young Black student, but also a suffering that is directly correlated to the intersections of his identity as a racialized man attempting to find success within a white supremacist institution.

But what if theory does not have to necessitate pain, as it so often does for marginalized and vulnerable populations working within volatile institutions and structures? There are many writers, theorists, mad activists, and cultural critics who have engaged with madness in ways that are respectful and careful. For example, La Marr Jurelle Bruce engages with madness beyond a subjective state, and instead as a methodology. He defines mad methodology as “a mad ensemble of epistemological modes, political praxes, interpretive techniques, affective dispositions, existential orientations, and ways of life.”[[736]](#footnote-736) Rather than imposing interpretive strategies of reason and order, Bruce’s mad methodology embraces the unruly affects, articulations, and embodiments of madness that “defy the grammars of Reason.”[[737]](#footnote-737) Inverse to many practices and methodologies resoundly legitimated by the academy and other sociopolitical institutions of knowledge, mad methodology is flexible, fluid, and sometimes requires a “relinquishing [of] the imperative to know, to take, to capture, to master, to lay bare all the world with its countless terrors and wonders.”[[738]](#footnote-738)

The inability to wholly *know* orcontrol is an experience I know well: will I make it another year?; will time be lost to another episode?; will I make it through the unflinching desire for self-obliteration? I turn to a diary entry, written in 2016, that contends with this lacuna of information:

I have struggled with my mental health my entire life — to be majorly and chronically depressed is to walk through a creaking mansion with no one home, except that drafty, sad house is my life. I walk everywhere in a daze; I don’t sleep well, I’m afraid of everything, and leaving my house is terrifying. I am afraid of my own body. I can’t even look at it in the mirror because it is the site of the worst things that have ever happened to me. It may be mine — I do take the time to feed it and dress it, walk around with it everyday, tattoo it, and use it for all of its purposes, but it doesn’t always feel like it’s mine. Did it stop being mine all those years ago?

I’ve been in and out of therapy, on and off medication, for almost all of my life. But I still wake up thinking about It everyday. I think about its lack of scars, and how no one knows. I think about the exhaustion I feel from reigning in my crippling anxiety attacks, now verging on twice a week. I think about me as a child, before all this happened, and how I used to watch *Avatar* on Saturday mornings after practicing piano for half an hour each day. Sometimes, when I feel that familiar ache in my stomach, I like to lie down and walk through my childhood. I can still see my family’s house exactly as it was when I was a child: a Pollock-esque kitchen ceiling; a carpeted bathroom. I am small, and my father is lifting me up. I remember the rapid ascent to the ceiling, the pulling of my skin where my father’s hands exerted that gravitational force as he lifts me up, up, up.

Do you think that, if I killed myself, it would matter? I mean, it would eventually. But in the hours before they find my body, they wouldn’t know. So it wouldn’t matter to anyone. And I would finally be alone.

Take today, for instance — today, I’m not doing anything or seeing anybody until dinner with my family. So, if I killed myself, no one would know until I didn’t show up at the restaurant. I wonder if they would assume that I’m being a brat. Or whether they’d be worried. Maybe they would eat their meal and plan to swing by my apartment after, and then they’d find me.

Everything is seeping in. There are only bad memories, and I just don’t feel necessary any longer.

What I find compelling about this diary entry from when I was 23 is the attention to the corporeal reality of madness. In other words, as I have theorized about the second series of nonsense as indicative of feminine expressions of madness, the body has “no surface,” becoming a conduit of affect. Consequently, language becomes “both at once” the “actions and the passions of the body.”[[739]](#footnote-739) In other words, there is no threshold that maintains the structural integrity of “propositions,” which now “mingl[e] their sonorous elements with the body’s olfactory, gustatory, or digestive affects.”[[740]](#footnote-740) In *Bodily Natures,* Stacy Alaimo details and analyzes the sociopolitical discourses that circulate around Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS, a bodily reaction that Alaimo argues is the epitome of “a trans-corporeal conception of the human,” and includes an attestation to the significance of “the flows and interchanges between body and environment.”[[741]](#footnote-741) Using this conceptualization of MCS, Alaimo meditates on “the emergent material world,”[[742]](#footnote-742) and its effect on bodies. She points out that environmental illnesses (EIs) born from chemicals, such as those lingering in the soil after wartime, “exten[d] the body outward into a trans-corporeal space,”[[743]](#footnote-743) determining the body as indistinguishable from the material world.

In my diary entry, I am interested in how I simultaneously separate my subjectivity from my body, and locate myself *within* my body through the material sensations of memory. In the first paragraph, I articulate a fear of my own body, describing it as a site of trauma despite my efforts to curate its aesthetic into a sight more palatable for me. My body no longer has scars that would be indicative of madness, and does not present an image of madness other than the fatigue from anxiety attacks. Launching into a memory of a wholesome Saturday morning routine, this recounting is interrupted by “that familiar ache in my stomach.” This corporeal response to a memory stands in direct opposition to the separation of subjectivity from body that came earlier in the entry. Even further, this guttural response is depicted as containing affective potential: the “familiar” stomach ache occasions lying down and re-membering, bringing together other fond memories with corporeal experiences, such as “the pulling of my skin where my father’s hand exerted that gravitational force.” In other words, the stomach ache “pass[es] out of the present moment and the situation it’s in, towards the next one,”[[744]](#footnote-744) in which I move to lie down. There is a remainder of “potential after each or every thing a body says or does,” so that this stomach ache comes to represent a “reserve of potential or newness or creativity […].”[[745]](#footnote-745)

Interestingly, this entry too presents a kind of surfacing, pushed up to the ceiling by my father before a plunge back into the abyss, where “[e]verything […] seep[s] in.” Here again the body is penetrated in a “primordial order”[[746]](#footnote-746) where language is “carved into the depth of bodies,”[[747]](#footnote-747) an embodiment that moves with and through me. This conceptualization of embodiment is a little different than typical deployments of the term, as “[w]e tend to think of embodiment in relation to self, but why not think about embodiment as a form of social debt, why not make embodiment an accumulation of social relations?”[[748]](#footnote-748) Following Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, critical Black scholar Phanuel Antwi uses economic concepts of credit and debt to reflect on how the neoliberal capitalist university weakens the bodies of young faculty of colour. This configuration “see[s] debt as the ontological condition of codependency,” thus reconfiguring the debtor as “a figure of solidarity.”[[749]](#footnote-749) Indeed, to take on a debt that can never be repaid, a social debt, is to refuse neoliberal capitalist narratives of productivity. Antwi notes,

Social debt shapes and moves bodies as it does institutions. The changing forms of our body are possible only if we are willing to be in debt to each other. That is to say, I see some transformation, some openings to new and more just forms of embodied life (in and beyond the academy) as possible if this shared project is taken up.[[750]](#footnote-750)

Social debt requires us to turn to the ones to which we are indebted, such as community members, kin, and loved ones. Antwi uses the personal example of falling ill, and how this treading in disability caused an incurring of “debts to interdependency.”[[751]](#footnote-751) Taking stock of these debts, Antwi writes, is “itself a formula of embodiment.”[[752]](#footnote-752)

What kinds of abilities do not incur debt? What kinds of intimacies does indebtedness produce? What kinds of solidarities? What kinds of debt lift some of us up, help us surface? I think here of my father’s hands, gripping my skin. What kinds of debt are momentarily revoked only to come back stronger than ever? I can still feel my father’s hands releasing me, placing me on the ground, only to throw me back up into the air again. How many hands have held me, helped me surface when I was otherwise weighted down? Whose hands, in effect, have become my “flotation devices,”[[753]](#footnote-753) helping me surface, transfigure, and open up other possibilities of embodied life?

What if, rather than thinking of suicide as a singular affliction that remains pathologized and worthy of a “grippy sock vacation,” we consider it another possibility of what Antwi calls embodied life, and a site of empowerment? Feminist critic and artist Audrey Wollen coined the term Sad Girl Theory as an “act of resistance, of political protest” to the dismissal of girls’ sadness as passive, “quiet, weak, shameful, or dumb [...].”[[754]](#footnote-754) Instead, she attempts to “open up the idea that protest doesn’t have to be external to the body.”[[755]](#footnote-755) This configuration of sadness as embodied resistance to the difficulties of girlhood thus reconfigures suicidal ideations and thoughts as “active, autonomous, and articulate.”[[756]](#footnote-756) As a major inspiration for Johanna Hedva’s Sick Woman Theory, Wollen’s Sad Girl Theory stands as an autotheoretical touchstone that does not seek to romanticize madness, suicide, or self-harm. Rather, Sad Girl Theory gestures towards re-cognizing (psychic and/or physical) practices of self-harm as a site of possibility, of embodied resistance to a harsh world that attempts to penetrate feminine madness with harmful epistemes of sanism.

I don’t know if this obliteration of self as resistance is sustainable, but I also don’t know if my existence will be sustained. The future is fluid, and, giving oneself over to mad methodology, as Bruce rightly pointed out earlier in this conclusion, is to grapple with the unknown. I do not know how much longer I will unfold, how many more times I will surface from the subterranean only to dive back in; however, I can say that my suffering is not unique. It is a mutual, shared, and common experience, although not universal.

Sometimes, when I am walking in the city, or alone in my apartment, I remember that there is no sameness. My differences are “not any more particular than anyone else’s differences.”[[757]](#footnote-757) I am not a singularity. I am an interdependent mind-body. I am not not beholden to the “boundaries that constitute myself as a single unit,”[[758]](#footnote-758) and that gives me the strength to go to sleep and wake up another day.

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36. Plato, *The Republic,* trans. Christopher Rowe (New York: Penguin Publishing, 2012), 70, 377e. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid, 354, 605b. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid, 75, 381b. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid, 347, 600e. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Longinus, *On the Sublime*; and Gray, “Mimesis in Greek Historical Theory,” *The American Journal of Philology* (108.3 (Autumn 1987): 467, 474. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Michel Foucault, *History of Madness,* ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2006), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry,* ed. J. A. Van Dorsten (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1982), 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid, 39, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind,* 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. John Churton Collins, “Introduction,” in *Pope’s Essay on Criticism* (Forgotten Books, 2012), xxxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Alexander Pope, “Essay on Criticism,” in *Pope’s Essay on Criticism* (Forgotten Books, 2012), 20, 642. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Middletown: n.p., 2017), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic,* 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ozark, “BFF,” *Netflix* video, 46:04, March 27, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ozark, “Fire Pink,” *Netflix* video, 00:38-04:25, March 27, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ozark, “BFF,” *Netflix* video, 54:12, March 27, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Foucault, *History of Madness,* 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991): 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Foucault, *History of Madness,* 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Patty Berne, quoted in Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work,* 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work,* 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Hannah Dyer, *The Queer Aesthetics of Childhood: Asymmetries of Innocence and the Cultural Politics of Child Development* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Mel Starkman, “The Movement,” 27, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*;andKristeva, *Black Sun*. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Hugh Haughton, “Introduction,” in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass,* ed. Hugh Haughton (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998), ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid, xlv. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid, xlvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid, xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophies of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Haughton, “Introduction,” xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Lecercle, *Philosophies of Nonsense,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ibid, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ibid, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ibid, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ibid, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense* (Texas, US: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid, 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid, 40, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Ibid, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid, 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Ibid, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Ibid, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Ibid, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990), 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Ibid, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Ibid, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Ibid, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Ibid, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Ibid, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Shoshana Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation.” *Yale French Studies,* no. 55/56 (1997): 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. See William A. Madden, “Framing the Alices.” *PMLA* 101.3 (May 1986): 362-373. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass,* ed. Hugh Haughton (New York, NY: Centenary Editions Penguin Classics, 1998), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Felman, “Turning,” 120, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures,* 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Felman, “Turning,” 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures,* 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Felman, “Turning,” 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Ibid, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Eldritch Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ibid, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Felman, “Turning,” 124, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Although it is possible to argue that paradoxes follow a binaric logic, Deleuze suggests that this critique is not true. Despite the fact that paradoxes seem to follow a logic of contradiction, akin to Lecercle’s theories on nonsense, Deleuze suggests that paradoxes are actually flows of thought, as evidenced in his structuring of *The Logic of Sense* as series of paradoxes that interconnect. He writes, “[P]aradoxes themselves enact the genesis of contradiction *and* inclusion in the propositions stripped of signification” (69). By this, Deleuze means that, in nonsense, paradox depicts the genealogy of its solutions while also illuminating the limits of these solutions. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Ibid, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures,* 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 8, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Ibid, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Ibid, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Ibid, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Ibid, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Richard Neer, quoted in Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Richard Neer, quoted in Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Ibid, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Karen Halttunen, quoted in David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Lynn Crosbie, *Paul’s Case* (Toronto, ON: Insomnia Press, 1997), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense,* 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Ibid, 84, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Ibid, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Ibid, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Massachusetts, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun,* 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Eugène LeBlanc and Nérée St. Amand, “Women in 19th-Century Asylums: Three Exemplary Women; a New Brunswick Hero,” in *Mad Matters* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2013), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Mary Pengilly, quoted in LeBlanc and St. Amand, “Women in 19th-Century Asylums,” 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. LeBlanc and St. Amand, “Women in 19th-Century Asylums,” 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Susannah Wilson, quoted in LeBlanc and St. Amand, “Women in 19th-Century Asylums,” 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Foucault, *History of Madness,* 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Plato, *The Republic,* 354, 605d-e. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Ibid, 350, 603a. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Robert Menzies, Brenda A. LeFrançois, and Geoffrey Reaume, “Introducing Mad Studies,” 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Ibid, 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ibid, 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, “Makeover television, governmentality and the good citizen.” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 22.4 (2008): 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Jijian Voronka, “Making Bipolar Britney.” *Radical Psychology* 7.2 (2008): 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Ibid, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10.2 (2007): 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Ibid, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Ibid, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Voronka, “Making Bipolar Britney,” 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Ibid, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Ibid, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Kristeva, *Black Sun,* 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “‘Fasting Girls’: Reflections on Writing the History of Anorexia Nervosa.” *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50(⅘) (1985): 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Ibid, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Dyer, *The Queer Aesthetics of Childhood,* 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol, *Haunting Violations: Feminist Criticism and the Crisis of the “Real,”* eds. Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Ibid, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Ibid, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Ibid, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Ibid, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Ibid, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Ibid, 10, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Ibid, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Ibid, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. At first glance, *Paul’s Case* does not seem to be written about women, particularly given the cover of the text, featuring a close-up photograph of Paul Bernardo’s face, and the title of the text; however, as I will explore in my first chapter, *Paul’s Case* offers a feminist critique of the ways in which media continue to deploy particular scripts in their reporting of male serial killers, such as the aestheticization of serial killers, while ignoring the sociopolitical implications of men committing violence against women. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Ibid, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Dyer, *The Queer Aesthetics of Childhood,* 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Kate Kaul, “Figuring Disability,” 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Ibid, 5, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Ibid, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Judith Butler, quoted in Kaul, “Figuring Disability,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Shosana Felman, “Madness and Philosophy *or* Literature’s Reason.” *Yale French Studies* 52 (1975): 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Kaul, “Figuring Disability,” 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Kalpana Wilson, “Towards a Radical Re-appropriation.” *Development and Change* 46.4 (2015): 820. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” in *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mieke Ball (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Ibid, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Ibid, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Ibid, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Ibid, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Ibid, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Jacques Derrida, quoted in Felman, “Madness and Philosophy *or* Literature’s Reason,” 216, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Felman, “Madness and Philosophy *or* Literature’s Reason,” 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Ibid, 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Ibid, 222, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Ibid, 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Ibid, 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021): 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Jeffrey R. Di Leo, “Deleuze in the Age of Posttheory.” *Symplokē* 6(½) (1998): 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Ibid, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Ibid, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Ibid, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Ibid, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Ibid, 63-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Ibid, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Ibid, 76-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Canadian artist, translator, and disability justice activist Vee (@fallforvee) writes, “I’ve come to understand that nuances are important and that they matter [...]. For example, when referring to Black folx, using ‘Black’ instead of ‘POC’ is important. [...] [It is intrinsically about race.” Vee then quotes Lori L. Tharps, a journalism professor at Temple University who writes, “Black with a capital ‘B’ refers to a group of people whose ancestors were born in Africa, were brought to the US against their will, spilled their blood, sweat and tears to build this nation into a world power and along the way managed to create glorious works of art, passionate music, scientific discoveries, a marvelous cuisine, and untold literary masterpieces.” Vee sums their thoughts up masterfully: “It is about Black folx reclaiming their power and it promotes *recognition* and understanding and *respect*.” I do believe that intentionally capitalizing the ‘B’ in ‘Black’ demonstrates my respect for an oppressed group of people; however, I critique suggesting that, as a white person, I can ‘recognize’ and ‘understand’ Blackness or Indigeneity. Recognition, as explored in the second chapter of this dissertation, is fraught with many dynamics that deserve expansion in their own right. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. But, unofficially, my care net, which includes doctors, have diagnosed me with a mild form of Ehlers-Danlo Syndrome, a disability that, in my case, causes abnormal amounts of spaces between joints and bones. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Johanna Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory.” *Johanna Hedva*. <https://johannahedva.com/>. Accessed November 11, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Andrea DenHoed, “The *My Favorite Murder* Problem.” *The New Republic* 22 November 2019. <<https://newrepublic.com/article/155801/favorite-murder-problem>> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Dyer, *The Queer Aesthetics of Childhood,* 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. How can I make sense of my abusers’ actions? Do they — or I — owe myself some sort of meaning? Do rationalizations even matter to me, at this point? [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Eric W. Hickey, *Serial Killers and their Victims* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1997), 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Ibid, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. James Alan Fox, Jack Levin, and Kenna Quinet, *The Will to Kill: Making Sense of Senseless Murder* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2019), 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Daniel Lea, “Trauma, celebrity, and killing in the ‘contemporary murder leisure industry.’” *Textual Practice* 28.5 (2014): 771. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Although I recognize that there are some serial killers that are women, I exclusively use the “he” pronoun when discussing serial killers in this dissertation because I not only intend to discuss Paul Bernardo almost exclusively, but also want to draw attention to the fact that, according to Schmid (p. 4), the “mainstream understanding of serial murder [...] sees nothing significant about the fact that the vast majority of serial killers are men and the vast majority of their victims are women.” [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Ibid, 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Ibid, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York City, NY: Verso, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities,* 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. John Ralson Saul, *Voltaire’s Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Books, 1993), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Ibid, 70, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, 54-55, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Ibid, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire’s Bastards,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Ibid, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Ibid, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Ibid, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Ibid, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Ibid, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Ibid, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Ibid, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Hickey, *Serial Murderers and their Victims,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, quoted in David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities,* 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. D’arcy Jenish, “Bernardo Trial Gets Underway.” *Maclean’s* 1995 May 29. <https://web.archive.org/web/20090206214348/http:/www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=M1ARTM0010421> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Stacey May Fowles, “When Paul Bernardo Stalked my Neighbourhood.” *The Walrus* 11 November 2013. <https://thewalrus.ca/boy-next-door/> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Roland Barthes, quoted in Lynn Crosbie, *Paul’s Case* (Toronto, ON: Insomnia Press, 1997), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay,* trans. Richard Miller (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1974), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Barthes, *S/Z,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Ibid, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Ibid, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Ibid, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Ibid, 77-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Ibid, 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Hickey, *Serial Murderers and their Victims,* 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Ibid, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Ibid, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Ibid, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. James Alan Fox, et. al., *The Will to Kill,* 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic,* 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Ibid, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Foucault, *History of Madness,* 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* ed. Nicholas Walker, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Ibid, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
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304. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Art: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Aesthetics* (Forgotten Books, 2015), 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Longinus, *On the Sublime,* 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Art,* 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Ibid, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Ibid, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Ibid, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Ibid, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Ibid, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. James Ackerman, quoted in Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
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319. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Ibid, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities,* 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. See page 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Ibid, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Philip Fisher, quoted in Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities,* 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Ibid, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Ibid, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Ibid, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Sean Redmond, “Pieces of me: Celebrity confessional carnality.” *Social Semiotics* 18.2 (2008): 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Mahita Gajanan, “The Story of Henry Lee Lucas, the Notorious Subject of Netflix’s *The Confession Killer*.” *Time Magazine* 2019 Dec. 6. <https://time.com/5745028/the-confession-killer-henry-lee-lucas-netflix/#:~:text=Henry%20Lee%20Lucas%20was,of%20these%20claims%20were%20lies.> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Lea, “Trauma, celebrity, and killing,” 777. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Ibid, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Lea, “Trauma, celebrity, and killing,” 770. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Massumi, *Politics of Affect,* 91, emphasis removed. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Felman, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Ibid, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Ibid, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Michel Foucault, *History of Madness,* ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 181, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Ibid, 4, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense,* 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Foucault, *History of Madness,* 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Ibid, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005): 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
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358. Godfrey Hodgson, “Sidney Gottlieb obituary.” *The Guardian* 11 March 1999. Quoted in Kinzer. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
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361. Ralston Saul, *Voltaire’s Bastards,* 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Michel Foucault, “About the concept of the ‘dangerous individual’ in 19th-century legal psychiatry,” trans. By Alain Baudot and Jane Couchman. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 1(1) (1978): 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Ibid, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
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370. Lea, “Trauma, celebrity, and killin,” 772. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
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374. Ibid, 348-349. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities,* 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Ahmed, “The Organisation of Hate,” 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 79.22, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Ibid, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Ibid, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Ahmed, “The Organisation of Hate,” 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
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384. Ibid, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Ibid, 123, emphasis removed. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Ibid, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
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390. Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass,* 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
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396. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
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398. Lea, “Trauma, celebrity, and killing,” 779. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
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402. Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
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406. Judith Butler, “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising,* ed. Robert Gooding Williams (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
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417. Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, *At War with Metaphor: Media, Propaganda, and Racism in the War on Terror* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009): xi-xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
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422. Sontag, “Illness as Metaphor,” 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York, NY: Verso, 2010), PAGE # [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Michel Foucault, “About the Concept of the ‘Dangerous Individual,’” 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 157, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. While Bernardo did not use an insanity defense in his trial, he was publicly labelled as “mentally ill” by the Canadian media, a trend in reporting on him that continues into the current day. Bernardo himself has accepted this label in an attempt to appease the parole board. As Colin Perkel details in the October 30th, 2018 edition of *The Globe and Mail,* “The fact that convicted killer and serial rapist Paul Bernardo resorted to blaming his sadistic behaviour on an anxiety disorder and low self-esteem underlines his lack of insight into his criminality, the Parole Board of Canada said [...].” [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 1, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Ibid, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Ibid, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Ibid, 3, emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Ibid, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Ibid, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Ibid, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Ibid, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Ewa Domanska, “Toward the Archaeontology of the dead body.” *Rethinking History* 9.4 (2005): 404-405. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Ibid, 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Ibid, 406. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Ibid, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. I want to flag the nearness of “diseased” to “deceased'' here, as Bernardo’s removal from society acts as a form of what Avery Gordon terms “social death” in her article “Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity.” Gordon explains that social death “refers to the process by which a person is socially negated or made a human non-person as the terms of their incorporation into a society: living, they nonetheless appear as if and are treated as if they were dead” (10). Crucially, she notes that “[t]he living dead haunt, [...] because in their liminality and in their ability to cross between the worlds of the living and the dead, they carry a sharp double-edged message: *it could be you*” (13, emphasis added). Those last four words function as a horrific warning that have reverberated in the skulls of many people who are part of groups disproportionately victimized by white men’s violence. Stacey May Fowles reports a story of a woman living in Scarborough: she was waiting for a bus when a man walked past and said, “You should be careful. I could be the Scarborough Rapist,” a stark reminder that you too can be victimized, pulled into Bernardo’s morbid orbit. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition,* 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Ibid, 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Stacey May Fowles, “When Paul Bernardo Stalked My Neighbourhood,” *The Walrus.* [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Lynn Crosbie, *Paul’s Case,* vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Gnostic Informant, “The Light of Gnosis: Pistis Sophia and The Demiurge - Robert M. Price,” 00:04:30. *YouTube* 23 Sept. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\_p94Wst4Svg&ab\_channel=GnosticInformant> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. Let’s Talk Religion, “What is Gnosticism?,” 30:14. *YouTube* 3 Oct. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ockwMVE7PgM&ab\_channel=Let%27sTalkReligion> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 399. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Cover copy. Lynn Crosbie, *Paul’s Case*. [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness: Revised and Updated* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 99, [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Brian Massumi, Politics of Affect, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Massumi, *Politics of Affect,* 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. I intentionally choose to use the terms “femininity” and “feminine bodies” when applicable rather than “female” or “women'' to not only make my subject position known as a gender non-binary individual, but also to, as Lauren Fournier writes in *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*,“quee[r] the label of ‘woman’ through trans, nonbinary, and genderqueer subjectivities” (31). In other words, I want to circumnavigate while also recognizing the trans-exclusionary language that is often used in this discursive field. Indeed, the trans existence has been highly medicalized in both a material and psychic sense. The intersection at which trans-femininity and madness meet is one that is highly complex and requires more theoretical labour that is situated in lived experiences. I cannot speak from this perspective, but I do intend to signal my recognition of the misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia that structures many medical and societal beliefs about transfeminine madness. In other words, I want to intentionally point out the cis-patriarchal structures that devalue femininity, but find transfemininity an exceptional threat. [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense,* 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory,* 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. Ibid, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. Julia Borossa, *Ideas in Psychoanalysis: Hysteria* (Cambridge, UK: Icon Books, 2001), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine,* 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. Ibid, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Ibid, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. Ibid, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. To be perfectly honest, there is no distinct reason that these texts are Canadian. I simply like Canadian literature, and read a lot of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. Foucault, *History of Madness,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. Voronka, “Making Bipolar Britney,” 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. Britney Spears, quoted in Jem Aswad, “Read Britney Spears’ Full Statement Against Conservatorship: ‘I am Traumatized.’” Variety 23 June 2021. <https://variety.com/2021/music/news/britney-spears-full-statement-conservatorship-1235003940/> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. Borossa, *Ideas in Psychoanalysis,* 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. Ibid, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Ibid, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. Ibid, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, “Spectatorship, Power, and Knowledge,” 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. Adnan Ghalib, quoted in Erin Lee Carr, director. 2021. *Britney vs. Spears.* (18:22-18:38). Netflix. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. Again, I turn to the fact that homophobia sometimes involves a significant aspect of misogyny; homophobia is produced from many affects, according to Sara Ahmed. One of these affects is fear over becoming-feminine, or even co-mingling with the feminine. As a result, many forms of ‘misbehaviour’ such as homosexuality, transgenderism, and queerness are assumed to be feminine within the gender binary, and are therefore rejected. [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. Kathryn Bond Stockton, “The Queer Child Now and Its Paradoxical Global Effects.” *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22.4 (2016): 506. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Ibid, 514. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. Voronka, “Making Bipolar Britney,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. *The New York Times,* Framing Britney Spears, 14:31. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. Mark Vincent Kaplan, quoted in Erin Lee Carr, *Britney vs. Spears,* 12:53. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. Voronka, “Making Bipolar Britney,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. Ibid, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. Ibid, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Lee Edelman, *No Future,* 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Ibid, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. Erin Lee Carr, *Britney vs. Spears,* 1:04:50-1:05:01. [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. Ibid, 1:05:06. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. Bianca Betancourt, “Why Longtime Britney Spears Fans Are Demanding to #FreeBritney.” *Harpers Bazaar* 12 Nov. 2021. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a34113034/why-longtime-britney-spears-fans-are-demanding-to-freebritney/> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. Mikki Kendall, “‘Free Nichelle’: protesters want to liberate Star Trek actor Nichelle Nichols from conservatorship.” *The Guaradian* 26 Jan. 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/jan/26/star-trek-actor-nichelle-nichols-free-conservatorship> Web. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. Ibid, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. Ibid, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. Ibid, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Ibid, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. Please refer to “Responses to Potential Criticisms and Critiques” in my introduction to read my thoughts on Deleuze’s use of the schizophrenic as metaphor, as well as my thoughts on reappropriation. [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. Ibid, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. Ibid, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun,* 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. Seth L. Schein, “The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylus’ ‘Agamemnon.’” *Greece & Rome* 29.1 (1982): 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. Ibid, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. Aeschylus, *Agamemmnon,* trans. Christopher Collard (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29, 1064. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. Ibid, 29, 1063. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. Ibid, 32, 1131. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. Ibid, 32, 1140. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. Ibid, 33, 1182. [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. Ibid, 33, 1195. [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. Ibid, 35, 1246. [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. Ibid, 35, 1247. [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. Ibid, 30, 1072. [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. Ibid, 33, 1178. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. Schein, “The Cassandra Scene,” 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. Ibid, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. Ibid, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. Ibid, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 89, 136-137. [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. Ibid, 90, 178-186. [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. Ibid, 94, 328-330. [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. Ibid, 92, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. Ibid, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. Ibid, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Ibid, 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. Ibid, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. Ibid, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense,* 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
543. Freud, *Dora,* 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
544. Ibid, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. Priest, *Boring Formless Nonsense,* 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
546. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine,* 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
547. Ibid, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
548. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
549. Ibid, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
550. Ibid, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
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555. Sturken and Cartwright, “Spectatorship, Power, and Knowledge,” 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
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570. Chesler, *Women and Madness,* 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
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572. Atwood, *Surfacing,* 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
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600. Piepzna-Samarsinha, *Care Work,* 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
601. Aeschylus, *Agamemmnon*, 29, 1063. [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
602. Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
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608. Ibid, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
609. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
610. Ibid, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
611. Ibid, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
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704. I recognize that the prioritization of reflexive artistic and hermeneutic practices opens auto-theory up to critiques of elitism; however, auto-theory does not remain isolated in an ivory tower. Instead, auto-theory’s indebtedness to feminist practices of citation creatively puts sometimes disparate works alongside each other in order to not only build community amongst other feminist thinkers, writers, and readers, but also extend situated knowledges that are hegemonically devalued into sources of knowledge considered hegemonically ‘legitimate’ due to their proximity to and deployment of valued ‘high theory’ thinkers. As an example, Fournier turns to Maiko Tanaka’s recounting of “her experience writing letters to her friend, a fellow woman of color, that were rife with citations of feminist literary and theory heavy-hitters like Claudia Rankine; these letters, Tanaka argues, make space for her and her friends’ own experiences, anecdotes, and responses to reading to be legitimate sources to be referenced and shared” (198). When positioned alongside Rankine, Tanaka contends, she and her friend become valued and legitimate references. [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
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706. Ibid, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
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