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Meghan E. Addison

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

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TO WHOM OCCURS THE HAUNTING:  
A SINGULAR EXPLORATION OF A DISTURBED FEMME PSYCHE

by

MEGHAN ADDISON

A master's capstone submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2018

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To Whom Occurs The Haunting: A Singular Exploration of a Disturbed Femme Psyche

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Meghan Addison

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies  
in satisfaction of the capstone requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

To Whom Occurs The Haunting: A Singular Exploration of a Disturbed Femme

Psyche

by

Meghan Addison

Advisor: Mark McBeth

By utilizing critical experimental writing, my capstone project will be an exploration of the haunting effects of transgenerational trauma and its lasting impact on the present-day psyche of one disturbed female subject - myself. Relying on multiple formats of writing, including but not limited to: memoir, autobiography, diaries, letters, poetry, and prose, as well the incorporation of multiple disciplines including the likes of: psychoanalysis, literature, philosophy, and critical theory, I will make an attempt to utilize the micro in exploration of the macro: to explore my unconscious realm in order to understand a larger political context surrounding female madness and hysteria. Focusing heavily on the works of the renowned 20<sup>th</sup> century psychoanalyst, Donald Woods Winnicott, in juxtaposition with the more experimental types of personal writing, I hope to intersperse his ideas surrounding early infantile development, play, and mother-infant dynamics, in order to give a rooted, psychological context not only to the lineage of female madness within my family, but also to a greater historical lineage of female hysteria. By doing so, I may place the particular, my life story, within a larger, contextual framework that incorporates intersectional ideas on race, class, gender, and sexuality. Although psychoanalysis and feminism have an oft combative history, I hope to reclaim the psychoanalytic space and the relationship between analyst and analysand through the writing out of my own experience in intensive psychoanalysis, as a potential liberatory space in

which the feminine can finally begin to speak the traumas of not only herself but those who have come before her in order to put a stop to the train of instability that wreaks havoc through generations of womyn. Through my Capstone, I will valorize and give weight to the forms of personal narrative and critical experimental writing that act as politicized statements of being which continue to go unnoticed and neglected within academia. I hope to prove this style of writing worthy of future academic pursuits in order to expand the notion of what is considered legitimate and serious writing.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page_____	i
Copyright Page_____	ii
Approval Page_____	iii
Abstract_____	iv
Autobiographic Background_____	1
Literature Review_____	6
Process and description of Capstone Project_____	14
Relationship to Track & Previous Course of Study_____	21
Evaluation_____	24
Continuation of the Project & Next Steps_____	27
Bibliography_____	29

## To Whom Occurs the Haunting:

### A Singular Exploration of a Disturbed Femme Psyche

#### *Autobiographic Background:*

“‘It is Percival,’ said Louis, ‘sitting silent as he sat among the tickling grasses when the breeze parted the clouds and they formed again, who makes us aware that these attempts to say, ‘I am this, I am that,’ which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false. Something has been left out from fear. Something has been altered, from vanity. We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a chain whirling round, round in a steel-blue circle beneath.’”<sup>1</sup>

“I think someone scared my mother, before I was born, a lot. So all the blood I got was shaky blood. Jumpy blood from my jumpy mother. And so all I see is stupid shaky sad stuff and dark skies and sharp corners. And I want other people to enjoy the same experience.”<sup>2</sup>

*The questions I pose below originate in my life, my story, my written I, and also my intellectual pursuits. How can one disentangle academic pursuits from the personal? The academic world pushes to keep dualisms as dualisms, but what in life is ever so neat.*

To talk about myself is to talk about my hair and my mother anger. It’s to talk about my mantras—that life changes so rapidly: that it’s the details: that tiny seemingly insignificant moments are entirely significant. It’s the sideways glances, not the direct stare that causes our tiny secretive me’s & I’s to coil away from our wrapped barbed wired fingers and in front of life’s

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf and Deborah Parsons, *The Waves* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 76.

<sup>2</sup> Will Eno, *Middletown: A Two-Act Play* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), 63.

snow-white mirror. Although some people look for moments: singular, tangible, round events we can take in our palms and share with another to explain how life took us to this particular spot in the universe, life is too shy for that. She shows herself in the details, and it is the details in which I am obsessed. This essay is fully of irony—and not because I am wearing flannel at a café in Seattle – but because I am going to talk about myself while also talking about our inability to know oneself, as it is through those moments when we’re not even paying attention that we peacock our feathers outside of our insides and accidentally let slip something real and uncensored.

I believe I was born a doll, a plaything for another’s insecurity. Some people have children to extend their legacy of mini selves into the decades that proceed; others need a missing part— a piece to answer her or his loneliness and feeling of insecurity. At birth I was sewn onto an unknown Siamese twin, one that I needed to mother from an early age, despite the fact I only knew how to hold a finger and breathe. My identity was disregarded, as was my voice, my space, my privacy, and my needs. However, I never realized I’d almost psychically adopted the past of my mother – without ever learning it. Nobody tells you how life is when you’re born; that’s the whole point, isn’t it? You need to figure out whatever blueprint you inhabit, but things complicate themselves when you’re dropped into a living reality with a past unknown and a future of guaranteed fear. It wasn’t until I began having personal meltdowns after years of daily nightmares did I comprehend my own anxiety. Because the past 5 years, although spanning from dreadful, to more dreadful, to somewhat dreadful, to just dread has forced a truer I to emerge. Before analysis, my self was so intertwined with that of my mother that I never even realized she was an anxious, hyper-sensitive, narcissistic, hysterical, aggressive, or depressed person. This is not a piece to demonize a human being—for although being, oftentimes, incredibly hard to keep at the forefront—my mother did not have pretty cards before her hand, though nor have many womyn come before her. And sometimes I wonder if this shaky blood, this fear I inherited from my

mother's story—one I intuited from observation of triggers and powerful emotions that now haunts my nightmares and filters many thoughts I have—is really the fear of the entire line of womyn that come before me, both inside and outside my bloodline.

So studies of anxiety are still inconclusive: what do we pass down through genetics, what is triggered by culture, what can break skin barriers and become a chronic concern originating from life? Do I carry the fears of my mother—can fear be transmitted genetically? Can memories build theaters in DNA? Or do all womyn share fears of the centuries? Do the connections I share with Virginia Woolf stem from biology, spirit, or culture?

I know I'm not unique—what white female in her twenties does not scream to the heaven's for the existence of Sylvia Plath, Gloria Anzaldúa, Zelda Fitzgerald, Audre Lorde, Anne Sexton, Virginia Woolf, Flannery O'Connor, Clarice Lispector, and so on and so forth. There seems to be something shared between womyn, and often times its fear – its fear of powerlessness, of domination, of attack, and most importantly: of not being heard. Feminists coin the term gaslighting for the way we make womyn feel guilty for feeling—for society's dramatizing all feelings. "You're overreacting", "It's nothing", "It's all in your head". So we've slowly driven her screams inside the mind and made her think they are not her own—you're just hearing voices, those cries are not your own, nor do you have a voice for that matter. And this is why I sought out not only graduate school, but psychoanalysis: to break away from the link of fear, of being unheard, or misunderstood. I may not know my I, I may think it strange we all sign the paper "I", but I wish to explore more of myself and whatever I've inherited in this shaky grayish blood of mine, through literature and through the ambiguous nature of the self. How can we know ourselves when so much has been determined from the drowned screams of the dead and the dead-living. Intuition can only take a solo self so far—scholastics can take one further backwards in time to study what womyn have been saying for so long yet still manages to stay quiet. A break in psyche

can be transferred: this is the rift I look to study.

With my capstone, I look to study explorations of identity, the self, ambiguity, and the importance of everyday life and its intricacies. Through my experiences with depression and anxiety—something, especially in current times, known to many people—I hope to create a fluid concept of identity in which we can blend not only with each other, but with objects and places, scents and sounds, and let us not forget words. Virginia Woolf in her work, *The Waves*, created a circle, a chain that linked all of humanity in a way that did not take away individual significance – this is what I hope to do with my capstone.

But Judith Butler first put the concept of our opaque identity into my mind’s archive, before I began working with Woolf. Reading *Giving an Account of Oneself*<sup>3</sup> my sophomore year of college, I was blown away by explanations of the limitations and preventions of understanding the self in a true way (for we can see ourselves as real, just not accurately) as well as the imagery of a spider web used to explain human existence and interconnectedness: that although we may not understand our place, we must believe that we are interrelated in ways we will not understand; that the more one tugs the arms in fear, and desperation, the more chaos one creates for the surrounding others. In such a desperately individualistic society, members crave uniqueness, instead of accepting this image of the web. Yet it is this web of unification that Woolf portrays through her works as well, showing the chain that enters each of us. As we look around at the passing faces, we ask questions of others through their eyes, their noses and hair, without fully understanding who they are, or who we are, or how they see us, or how we see them – despite living in a false sense of fixity. Whose opinion is truer? Whose reality holds the most weight? These are such questions I explore in my capstone.

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

Furthermore, I aim to explore such things as Gloria Anzaldúa advocates in her works, exploring middles of binaries that paints the body as limitless—not something we must leave—but something we must expand and contract, something opening and closing or flitting back and forth like a wave.<sup>4</sup> In the play *Middletown* by Will Eno, the Librarian states to the hopeless mechanic with jumpy blood: “Some people say the secret to life is being able to live in the middle of all our different ideas about life.”<sup>5</sup> The area of the middle is where I’d like to explore. Not the extremes, the polarities, the differences, but the similarities, the centers: that which opposites share. The fact nothing remains, yet nothing disappears. The fact moments are significant and also insignificant. The fact we can see ourselves, and not know ourselves. These middles are truer origins worthy of exploration than outsides and insides, for barriers are never so concrete.

However, most importantly, the aim of my capstone is to gather the insides of contradicting ideas that vibrate inside my head: that we are interconnected, as womyn, as citizens, as dreamers, but that I, Meghan Addison, also have an independent voice. “I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream.”<sup>6</sup> Just not yet, at least.

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<sup>4</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Writers Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1954), 80

## *Literature Review*

“In collecting my essays for this retrospective volume, I found myself adding autobiographical bits, not only, I hope, because I tend to think toward exhibitionism but, more important, because at times I think through autobiography: that is to say, the chain of associations that I am pursuing in my reading passes through things that happened to me.”<sup>7</sup>

“Personal criticism as I intend it has to do with a willing, knowledgeable, outspoken involvement on the part of the critic with the subject matter, and an invitation extended to the potential reader to participate in the interweaving and construction of the ongoing conversation this criticism can be, even as it remains a text.”<sup>8</sup>

“Every writer of creative nonfiction is an Ishmael who alone has lived to tell the tale—the true story that only he or she can tell. I write for the usual reasons writers write about anything important: to get at the truth; to make sense of things that don't make sense; to set the record straight; to tell a good story.”<sup>9</sup>

Before I describe the process of my project, I want to provide sufficient justification for why I did what I did: I foresee that I stand trial. Why write experimentally, creatively, critically, autobiographically? Well, for many reasons. Because it suited me, yes of course; but also because the style of writing I chose to adopt has *merit*, dare I say academic merit even. In Marianna

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<sup>7</sup> Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Ann. Caws, *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Z. Bloom, "Living to Tell the Tale: The Complicated Ethics of Creative Nonfiction," *College English* 65, no. 3 (January 2003): 277, doi:10.2307/3594258.

Togorvnick's piece, "Experimental Critical Writing", she explores her own experience with writing freely, outside of the constraints of the traditional (aka masculine) scholastic voice that plagues academia. For Togorvnick, the styles passed on from educators to the students at large, does not serve their purpose any longer, as not only does this style promote an idea of a falsely expansive intellectual prowess, it also masks us from the very real subjectivity that drives all of our works:

But the styles we were taught can't work now in the same ways they worked fifty or even fifteen years ago. No one who gets around to writing a book, or even an essay, ever reads everything that has been written about its subject. Yet we cling to the fiction of completeness and coverage that academic style preserves. This style protects us, we fondly believe, from being careless or subjective or unfair. It prescribes certain moves to ensure that the writer will stay within the boundaries that the academy has drawn.<sup>10</sup>

Foucault has taught us that, academics, just like other institutions, prescribes rules for how they want their followers to behave, or in this case, read and write. It was not that I wanted to actively work against this idea, but that I wanted to work from my own voice *outside* of the restraints of traditional academic writing. However, in order to break free from this box, one needs to understand what the box is in the first place. Togorvnick explains the liberation of freeing oneself from what she calls a "thus and therefore style" of writing, a style that utilizes said words for a distancing effect<sup>11</sup>, but in order to truly rid oneself from what I refer to as bad habits, Togorvnick writes, "I had to know my cage so I could open it at will."<sup>12</sup> One must understand what the traditional formatting is before trying to break the rules—for as I go on to repeat later on, I do not believe in breaking the rules unless one knows what the rules are. In many ways, this is a very

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<sup>10</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, "Experimental Critical Writing," *Profession*, 1990, 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595449>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

conservative thought.

As I mention frequently in this essay, the way I wrote is the only way I know how to write, that is to say I do not know how to write in a way that is not personal or autobiographic. All writing is subjective, whether or not academics wants to acknowledge that fact or not. One cannot simply write from the perspective of a different consciousness than one's own (however open I am to the critique of this point), thus in many ways, all writing is personal. Torgovnick echoes this thought when she writes:

...but I am saying that writerly writing is personal writing, whether or not it is autobiographical. Even if it offers no facts from the writer's life, or offers just a hint of them here and there, it makes the reader know some things about the writer—a fundamental condition, it seems to me, of any real act of communication. And real communication is exciting. For me, at any rate, the experience of this new kind of writing—which not only recognizes the pitfalls of the standard academic style but goes out of its way to avoid them—has been exhilarating.<sup>13</sup>

Communicating with my audience is my main goal. I wanted to be able to reach through the pages, to the person on the other side in an attempt to, not only elicit an emotional reaction from them, but also to have a dialogue. To create a shared space in which the reader and I were speaking to one another, in a manner that might influence someone to go out and write something of their own. Again, I mean this not in the sense that I believe my words will begin a new beginning, rather I speak from a desire to write from a place of vulnerability so that I could have a real connection with my reader in which something may come about from the transaction—perhaps a proliferation of texts that speak and engage with one another, maybe even outside the institution which then

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 27

enters the wider community. “In a very real way, (although my writing includes precious few autobiographical revelations),” Togorvnick writes, “I could not think of myself as a writer until I risked exposing myself in my writing.”<sup>14</sup> There is risk in exposing oneself through writing, but there is also the very real trade-off of being able to communicate something to a reader that has never been communicated *in that language* before. I did not write as if my ideas were original, or that I was the first to make my case—certainly not in the case of inherited female trauma in this instance—but I did consider that maybe a reader has never come across that idea spoken *in that manner*. Everyone processes information differently, and some of us process ideas through a writing style that utilizes ambiguity, metaphor, poetry, etc., rather than impersonal statements of fraudulent objectivity.

When it comes to these varied styles of writing, in the instance of metaphors, For Nany K. Miller, they should be, and must be taken seriously, as they are an, “an economical way both to theorize outside of systems dependent on a unitary signature (allowing you to combine things that usually do not go together) and to imagine in the material of language what hasn’t yet come—what might not be able to come—into social being.”<sup>15</sup> Being able to play with language in a way that might not otherwise be played with in a literal fashion—should this not be the goal of writing? To allow something to come into being that might not have had the opportunity otherwise; I take language seriously enough to do so, but I also still see it as pretty girl ready to be manipulated for my personal gain. Never forget that the writer writes, there is someone behind the curtain doing the crafting, this should not be disguised through a false sense of authority in which the author is erased, as if by false modesty, but expanded upon liberally by the writer which acknowledges the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991), xii.

potential supremacy of the craft.

For Miller, many writers speak either from the perspective of a specific label, or on behalf of a particular group. This sense of stringent identification, coupled with a condescension in which one acts as the supreme authority figure of a particular group, makes writing become a pigeonholed activity. Therefore, the type of writing Miller calls for in *Getting Personal* allows for a liberation from these suffocating markers which not only distances one from an X or Y label, but also allows for a reconfiguration of theory: “I read this work as a renewed attention to the unidentified voices of a writing self outside or to the sides of labels, or at least at a critical distance from them, and at the same time as part of a wider effort to remap the theoretical.”<sup>16</sup> For Miller, through writing personally she aims not to throw away theory, but to reclaim theory and turn it back on itself.<sup>17</sup> Theory inundates academic writing, however by turning theory back on itself and by calling for a different kind of writing, one can begin to fall in love with the practice of writing, As Miller poetically reminds us, there is an opportunity with our academic work of “Being in love with writing, with language, with one’s own movement into writing.”<sup>18</sup> Why do we not return to a state of being where writing was enjoyable, where we have the opportunity to fall in love with our own voice and a new style of writing in which not only do we find pleasure, but we also find the ability to connect once again with the outside world. Returning to this idea of engagement with the audience through the act of writing, Miller makes an incredibly astute point when she eloquently writes:

If we further entertain the notion that the recognition of zones and boundaries is not necessarily the gesture of a personal territorialism—a nationalism of the ‘I’—but rather the very condition of the exchange with another limited other, the contract of this writing and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., X.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 8.

reading then can be seen as a chance for a vividly renegotiated sociality.<sup>19</sup>

To write personally is not egocentric, or at least does not need to be. In writing from the place of an I, one does not create a barrier between self and other, rather one points to the very flimsiness of boundaries that separates each of us. Writing is an engagement between individuals, a conversation, in which people from all backgrounds can participate with one other in an exchange that might not have been possible otherwise. Boundaries are the condition of these conversations with an other and to make light of said limitations through writing autobiographically, one opens the door for this potentially “renegotiated sociality.”<sup>20</sup>

So I have written autobiographically, I have written critically, and experimentally, but most importantly, I have written creatively. Creative non-fiction too receives its critiques for whether it should be considered a worthy genre of writing. How can one explore “fact” through “fiction”? Well, in many ways, creative non-fiction seeks to explore the ways that the facts we tell ourselves are in fact fictive, or at least more complex, and subjective than many people choose to realize. Writing from a place of creative non-fiction does not mean that one takes liberties in expanding the truth to suit their storyline, but to give very real weight to the nuance and dynamics of the story. Lynn Z. Bloom writes in “Living to Tell the Tale: The Complicated Ethics of Creative Nonfiction”, how those who are writing creative-nonfiction actually have more of an ethical obligation to explore their truth for not only themselves but also their readers:

Because writers of creative nonfiction are dealing with versions of the truth, they-perhaps more consistently than writers in fictive genres-have a perennial ethical obligation to question authority, to look deep beneath the surface, and an aesthetic obligation to render their versions of reality with sufficient power to compel readers' belief. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Bloom, 278.

Because one tells a story that is their version of the truth, does not mean that the reader must be open to said writer's subjective stance; and just as the writer questions authority in the hopes of looking below the surface, so too must the reader question the authority of the writer behind the words. What I mean by this is that the writing must be believable, or in Bloom's case, imbued with enough power to make it believable. Readers are smart enough to call bullshit when something smells fishy. If one wants to be a trustworthy writer to their readers, they have an ethical obligation to tell their version of the story with as much accuracy as possible. Therefore, writing creatively does not mean one is not writing truthfully. Later, Bloom goes so far to say that creative non-fiction may in fact be, because of this power and clarity in the writing, "a more ethical expression of the author's ideas than seemingly objective academic articles might be..."<sup>22</sup> Once again we're dealing with the belief, by writers, that to write creatively, even fictively, could potentially be not only more effective, but more ethical than the "objective" writing perpetuated in academia. Through my own capstone, to have written "objectively" would have been to lie to my readers. Writing ambiguously and experimentally was for me a more honest expression of how I viewed my own reality, my past, and my upbringing, than if I had pretended to present the facts outside of my own subjective viewpoints. That did not give me the permission to deviate from the truth, but to portray my truth as I understood it—non-linearly and non-objectively.

Now, I often had qualms, and continue to have qualms when I utilize other subjects in my writing, particularly my family. Some may say it is an invasion of privacy to speak of someone else without their permission, or in my case, even without their knowledge. However, Bloom once again returns to the idea of ethics, in that:

More- over, such familial courtesy might, intentionally or otherwise, serve to protect more

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 286.

than the family secrets. As an operative principle of the text, such self-censorship could easily become a mandate to affirm the goodness and normative character of one's own household, its class- and status-bound values, and thus a way to critique, if not condemn, the "others," outsiders, the not-us.<sup>23</sup>

I do not want to condemn my family, or those who have come before me in my lineage, but to lie about the madness that plagues the womyn and men in my family would be to once again lie to the reader. I come from a white, upper /middle-class background, and in many ways the silencing of these issues would be not only to act unethically, but to protect the image that my family has long perpetuated, that of a false stability. To repress and to deny would be unfaithful, but would potentially perpetuate the idea that to experience mental health traumas is only for the weak, the lowly, and the poor. I do not desire to keep my family bleached white from their dirty past, but to unearth the decades of traumas that has continually gone unacknowledged. By widening the experience of mental health to a seemingly suburban well-to-do family, allows less room for maintaining class and race privilege and more room for creating the radical social renegotiation Miller discusses in which more people can connect with one another who seemingly had nothing on which to connect previously.

I hope in taking these arguments in mind, I have given justification to the style of writing I undertook for my capstone in the desire that more people will continue to experiment in their work, whether similar to my style or not. As Miller writes in *Getting Personal* "...this is the hope, I think, of all published autobiographical writing—but also of gestures, not predetermined, that would bring out other voices from their own shadows."<sup>24</sup> I know many voices are hiding in the shadows, but maybe, just maybe, they will begin to see more work such as mine and begin to tell the story

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,280.

<sup>24</sup> Miller., 24.

they want to tell in the manner they want to tell it. That should be the goal of academia: to encourage writers to find their own voice, to tell their own story, and to create a solid and entertaining text.

### *Process and description of Capstone Project*

In many ways, I have been writing my capstone since birth—or to put it less hubristically and perhaps less dramatically, this capstone has its origins dated not only to my birth but also the births of those who have come before in my family lineage. After reading the project, you might think that I've been an inquisitive researcher surrounding my family history since childhood, but in many ways the opposite is in fact the case. From my parents I learned not to ask questions and to keep my mouth shut. Questions about the two of them, questions about myself, questions about the past, even questions about reality - they remained halted, not in the back of my throat for that would be closer not only to expulsion but also to semblance of conscious awareness, but embedded deep into my gut, woven into my stomach lining, floating with the bile and acid. The questions did not go unanswered because I learned not to ask them, and because of this I became a mystery to myself and all around me too became part of this mystery. When you lack a tangible form—enhanced by the aggressive exploitation of a borderline narcissist mother—boundaries become blurred, and all becomes porous: it is this porosity that lead to the genre of writing to which I'm drawn: no-genre. In some sense, a quite simple fact is that it is nearly impossible for me to write any other way than the way in which I write. To wander, to roam, to digress, to meander, or even to contradict, this is my method of being, and this is how I choose to write, especially when I decided how to formulate my capstone project.

My research is heavily drawn from my personal writing: journals, diaries, post-its, fragments, emails, notes, scribbles on the margins of my favorite books, splices of writing I've been working on for the past 5 years or so. I spent months going through everything I'd ever

written, both inside and outside graduate school and pulling excerpts I found poetic, lyrical, insightful in order to take an overall look at what I was drawn too. I pulled from nearly every term paper I wrote in graduate school, including personal statements. Particularly useful was a paper I wrote on Borderline Personality Disorder my first semester and a project called “MyStory” I wrote for my advisor Mark McBeth’s critical experimental writing course. I knew, with the help of Mark, that there was a running thread, and that if I looked closely enough at the seemingly odds and ends of my personal writing, I could find a way to pull them all together into some sort of unified whole. To make a unified whole does not mean that all must be unified or in unison, however, so I spent much of my time editing the piece in a way that would make the piece simultaneously readable and disruptive, cohesive yet spliced, traditional, yet entirely non-traditional. One thing my advisor and I have discussed is the way that sometimes, what we consider traditional, can be in many ways, or at least in some instances, the most radical. While writing, I did not throw the rule book out, but looked for ways I could bend the rules to work in my favor. As you can see, much of my process has been spent less in writing, and more so in the editing stage. Constantly re-organizing, inserting, deleting, re-arranging, re-formatting – for example, the ending became my beginning and the beginning my ending, or a lengthy interlude was broken into pieces and woven throughout the text. Much of my time was spent reading through the paper over and over and over and over and over and over again, seeing how to make the piece readable and pleasantly unenjoyable for I wanted to create something that was disruptive and reflective of my disturbed psyche.

In many ways the text is it itself a performance of being. I felt it necessary to perform the act of instability for the reader so that they might understand, as much as possible, first-hand, what it felt like to *be* unstable. The unraveling of the text is itself indicative of an unraveling psyche—to me, this performance felt a more significant method for getting my point across than if I had done a traditional academic paper that would have been devoid of the intense emotions I was trying to

convey. Therefore, the structure of the paper is itself intentional, it is not written to be haphazard and fragmented merely for the purpose of being radical but is itself structured as such so that the text becomes emblematic of the ideas I am trying to convey. The capstone project is my instability embodied, created tangible, so that it may be processed by someone else outside of me. I wanted to externalize my internal world, however such processes are unable to be reined in or muted, thus what results is a performance of my madness, and the madness of others who have come before me.

In another sense, the performativity is itself indicative of the performativity of madness womyn have executed as a result of being told she is mad. That is to say that she is diagnosed as mad, and thus begins to act mad, fulfilling the prophecy thrust upon her. I wanted to toy with this nuance of self-imposed madness as performing the role she is “supposed” to play, while also acknowledging the very real potential not only for internalization of this self-imposed madness, but the possibility that she is really mad underneath. Mad as in angry, mad as in unstable. As one can see, there are many meanings I’m trying to get across with inherited female instability and its nuances and complexities, thus the nature I chose to write in – intentionally fragmented, abstract, and ambiguous – felt the most fitting because it provided the expansiveness necessary for the reader to be able to mull over these ideas on their own and, as Barthes would say, read away from the text. I wanted the readers to daydream, their thoughts roaming away and back again in order to be both situated inside the text and also floating outside of it trying to get inside and comprehend what in fact is happening. In other words, disrupted. It was imperative that the reader move from feeling scared and lost, to comforted and cozy, to angry and frustrated, to nervous and uncertain, to stabilized and secure, and back again—the entire rollercoaster of emotions which again signifies to some extent, an experience of being a self-identified womyn in society, let alone a womyn who is mad.

When it comes to the literary cameos who make appearances in my paper such as Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Clarice Lispector, these are all womyn who have undergone or at least written about the experiences of instability in her lifetime, whether through fiction or non-fiction. Both Woolf's and Plath's diaries were extremely impactful for my writing because they both were able to write in a lyrical and poetic way the struggles they faced. However, not only that, these womyn were clearly working through their neurosis and psychosis, if I may be allowed to pathologize her, through the act of writing. A tangential note: Hogarth Press run by Leonard and Virginia Woolf was the first to publish Freud in English, with members of the infamous Bloomsbury group being analysts and translators of Freud and Klein as well. Many wonder why Virginia Woolf never entered into analytic treatment considering not only her close ties to psychoanalysis but also the popularity of analysis in London during her lifetime, as well as her sometimes fragile mental state. Many speculate that the Woolf's feared treatment would impact her ability to write. Feminists have taken this approach to analysis, and the greater psychiatric field for good reason of course, so I wanted to prove through my writing that analysis could be a potentially liberatory space for womyn to speak not only her traumas, but unpack the traumas stored in her body that have been carried through generations.

Returning to Plath & Woolf, both can be considered solitary womyn who chose to work through their psychic pain through the act of writing, the act itself being a form of therapy. However, that is not to say that writing did not also enhance the neurosis for either womyn, as both stuck to routines and schedules in order to stay confined and controlled, especially while dealing with such emotionally charged material (I might be speaking more of Plath than Woolf here). When writing about destabilizing topics, or subjects as similarly fragmented and ambiguous as my capstone, it is important to stick to routine in order to stay as grounded as possible. As Winnicott writes, it is not an issue of living in bits so to speak, but of living in bits for too long, or failing to

return to a cohesive state of being. Plath and Woolf in her diaries struggled with the insecurity of what they produced and doubted their own capacity to make something great, especially as they were being denounced by critics during their lifetime. Their openness and honesty with their insecurity, as well as their acting out or performing their state of being in their diaries in a way that acknowledged the potential for an audience was particularly inspiring. Plath in particular, *must* have known her diaries would one day be read, or at least hoped that they would be, and her acknowledgement of this is for me, not solipsistic, but sincere. Plath performed her truth for an audience because the emotions she underwent required one for their largeness to be adequately conveyed. I wanted to be extreme in my capstone, to take things to their utmost limit, because for me, that is how I experience my mental health, and that is how I would get my point across: as something intense, unnerving, and destabilizing. These are not characteristic that would convey themselves had I written in a monotone, dry, academic manner.

Which leads me not only to my interest in psychoanalysis, but also my experience in intensive 4 days a week analysis spanning roughly the course of my graduate career. Much of my writing comes directly from thoughts and conversations and topics explored during my time in analysis. In fact, without analysis I can quite easily guarantee there would be no capstone. But it was not just my interest in my own unconscious, but my interest in the larger psychoanalytic concepts that drove this project, which acted as a guiding force. I became obsessed with the language and the poetry of my favorite thinkers: Marion Milner, Donald Woods Winnicott, and Adam Phillips under whom I read as much as I could find. I first read Marion Milner's work *A Life of One's Own*<sup>25</sup> in my early twenties because at that time I was largely infatuated with all things Virginia Woolf and would read anything even vaguely related by title to Woolf's. Marion Milner's

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<sup>25</sup> Marion Milner, *A Life of One's Own* (Routledge, 2011).

work was a story of researching one's self merely by exploration (i.e. time and patience) and encouraging greater self-awareness—though seemingly trite and potentially cliché, it was simple and easy to understand and gave me comfort during my lengthy period of instability that these properties and processes were within reach. As you can see from my project, much of my writing is a sort of working through of the odds and ends of my life and finding a way to pull everything together: the ultimate goal being to make an object of writing that was emblematic of my internal thoughts and processes. In regards to Marion Milner I later learned she would eventually become a psychoanalyst and become part of what would be called “The Middle Group”, a cohort of psychoanalysts who fell neither devoted to Klein or to the Freud family during the 20<sup>th</sup> century but to their own circle of study, which would eventually lead me to discover a man who despite being dead, I have major father transference for: Donald Woods Winnicott.

I first learned of Winnicott from Alison Bechdel's *Are You My Mother?*<sup>26</sup> in which she introduced me to the concepts of being a “good enough mother” or “transitional objects”<sup>27</sup>, topics that I understood not on an intellectual level but an intuitive somatic manner. Furthermore, her writing was critically experimental—using visuals to convey her ideas, writing lyrically about the dense topics she discovered in her analytic research, as she too underwent various types of therapies, and so too turned to Winnicott to feel comforted. One might say I also felt a maternal transference to Bechdel as well. (In many ways, much of my research is driven by thinkers I have parental transferences for, in particular Woolf and Winnicott. Despite being 28, I'm desperate for a mother and a father).

Therefore, the words Bechdel wrote, my body ate—I turned to Winnicott and to psychoanalysis and to new ways of writing wholeheartedly. So why Winnicott in particular?

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<sup>26</sup> Alison Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Because not only did he write in ways I understood, he also discussed topics of early infant development that resonated with my project. His ideas were considerate, expansive, and incredibly radical in comparison to the psychoanalytic thinkers I had read before. Winnicott for me felt generative, and explored pathology not in a cynical way, but in a way that was potentially liberatory and potentially freeing. He did in fact famously write, “We are poor indeed if we are only sane.”<sup>28</sup> Winnicott wrote simultaneously of psychopathology as something normal and something real that needed remedying. Psychoanalysis, therefore, was a tool to greater self-awareness and happiness, but it was not the sole answer. For him the analyst did not have the answers, the patient did. It was not about the interpretation given by the analyst, but the discovery made by the analysand *with the help* of the analyst. In many ways, Winnicott became my analyst on the side, working with me through the text to make my own discoveries. Feeling this sense of agency in regard to my own mental state and the potential for healing directly combatted the sense of futility I often I faced when struggling with my mental health and mental health I inherited from those who have come before me.

And yet, I was not satisfied with the manner in which psychoanalysis was written by thinkers like Freud and Klein, aside from the likes of Milner and Winnicott, and I wanted to learn how to write about academic topics in a poetic way. For me, analysis is poetry and I devoured the concepts in a way that transcended the dry language under which it is often written. Learning should be fun, reading should be enjoyable, thus I wanted to set-out for my project in researching topics but writing about them for a non-traditional audience that utilized creative ways of writing. There is more than one method for digesting information, and I chose to write the fun way, or at least the way it is fun for me. However, to do so actually required more skill and planning because

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<sup>28</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945): 150.

I first had to learn the concept myself, and rather than regurgitate the information in a similar manner as it was written, find a way to put into words that spoke to me creatively. I read voraciously and took notes as the thoughts naturally came to me. Once again, the way I write is the way I think, and in many ways, my capstone is the most natural thing I've done in my academic career for I was not imposing a particular structure or method of writing, simply because that was what I was told to do. For me, writing traditionally requires translation, yet writing such as my capstone comes without a censor or inhibiting factor. I wrote as a thought and I thought as I wrote.

For a long time, I did not question the territories of unreality that surrounded my own psychic development, that was until I dealt with the existential dilemma of being entirely lost and without a cause or purpose in life, so that I began having such extreme anxiety and depression I eventually turned to drugs and dissociative avoidance. It was not until I entered therapy that I began to learn to speak and examine my history, a history riddled with questions of power, authority, gender, sexuality, race, class, etc. which could in fact be unpacked if examined closely. Thus, from my parents I learned to keep my mouth shut, and not ask questions, whereas from my therapists, I learned how to speak and dig deep. It remains a challenge for me to unpack or separate my personal experience of mental health, my lived experience of being a white self-identified female from the bay area, and my academic pursuits and intellectual interests because these interests are entirely intertwined. In many ways my capstone project is the culmination of my own psychic development and attempt at integrating all that has been lost through the failed environment of my maturation process.

### ***Relationship to Track and Previous Course of Study***

The answer is simple: to study the haunting effects of feminine transgenerational trauma on the present day, one must listen to the voices of womyn and femmes who have come before. Not a filtered voice written by a masculine authority or biased third party, but a voice that comes directly

from her mouth, written by her own hand. There is no better way to do so than through personal & life writing: memoir, autobiography, diaries, letters, etc., where one can grasp the concrete, embodied histories of the generations of female ancestors. My scholarly work heavily encompasses creative non-fiction and personal writing which found its niche quite nicely in the track of *Biography, Autobiography, & Memoir Studies*, including the course *Approaches to Life Writing* I took with Annalyn Swan that introduced me to the complexities and nuances of life writing. Additionally, one semester I found myself in Professor Domna Stanton's *Writing the Self: From Confession to Life-Writing* where we examined all forms of life writing ranging from diaries to testimony to selfies, with a syllabus that focuses on the marginalized and outcasted all investigated through feminist hermeneutics. Both courses granted and continue to grant me the diversity of perspectives about life writing so that I may gain the necessary tools to critically and analytically examine their literature with a discerning eye in which context is never taken for granted.

However, to understand the generations of womyn within and outside my family lineage, one cannot merely understand her written voice in isolation, outside of a historical, political, and cultural landscape, but must investigate the context through which her pages speak. The track of *Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies* provided me, such as the *Feminist Texts & Contexts* course I took with Professor Jean Halley did, a foundation on which I could place my personal research into my family lineage, as well as a greater historical lineage of female hysteria so that I could place the particular within a larger, contextual framework that incorporates race, class, gender, and sexuality. I cannot deny my status as a feminist when I examine life-writing, thus the two tracks I chose granted me the ability to intertwine my love of personal narratives and my never-ending research into gender and sexuality.

As my work focuses heavily on a psychoanalytic framework (particularly a radicalized, feminist take on psychoanalysis), and more specifically womyn inside the psychoanalytic setting

and the *potential* liberation the space provides, the two tracks complimented this research in giving value and life to studying the subconscious and its traumas—traumas which once again cannot be separated from the larger political arena. So how to the two tracks come to play? Firstly, the psychoanalytic work between analyst and analysand acts as form of life writing in which they create a mutual “text” together, and secondly, psychoanalysis has a deep, combative history with feminist movement, which I do not aim to reconcile but to explore and see where the psychology and feminism can coincide and embrace one another—a harmonious blend I learned to think through in Patricia Clough’s *Issues in Contemporary Theory* on the “Contemporary Psyche and the Social”. Furthermore, what better place to study the subconscious, or even the Jungian collective unconscious, than through personal stories that are emblematic of greater sociopolitical issues? My interest in womyn in psychoanalysis stems both through my own participation in analysis, and that of other female scholars and writers such as Eve Sedgwick, Marion Milner, and Marie Cardinal who have explored through critical experimental writing, personal narrative, and autobiography respectively their own ego wounds and personal experiences undergoing analysis, and who acts as my guide for my own capstone work. The course I took with professor Wayne Kostenbaum titled *Notebooks & Irregular Accountings*, introduced me not only to the works of fragments, diaries, free association, and the aside, as precious and insightful forms of the written word, but also spurred my own creative writing through alternative, experimental practices, which I have rigorously continued with Mark Macbeth’s *Navi/Negotiation Voice: Critical Experimental Writing*. With Professor McBeth, I’ve learned the ins and outs of writing experimentally while still retaining a critically discerning eye that does not lose sight of craft, style, form, and voice. McBeth’s course was integral in giving me the skills to write about womyn in psychoanalysis in a noteworthy yet skilled way.

The two aforementioned tracks provided me the flexibility and freedom to understand her

life writing, as well as the gendered setting of her voice which allows for the ability to critically examine these womyn's stories, and that of my own, from a political standpoint that does not negate the filters and biases through which we read her story. I wish to read womyn's stories to better understand my own, but, to do so, I cannot neglect the feminist work of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in giving credence and value to life writing, but instead wish to continue to valorize and give weight to the forms of personal narrative that act as politicized statements of being which continue to go unnoticed and neglected within academia.

### *Evaluation*

For someone as critical as myself, I'm never particularly going to like the work I create. I had extreme difficulties in not only picking a topic—nearly every paper I wrote in graduate school I thought about continuing on—but in balancing work, school, and personal life balance. Had it not been for a deadline, I easily could have continued this project for another year at the very least (the continuation of my capstone I will get to in the next section). Furthermore, I wish I had more time to read thinkers that were suggested to me by my advisor, but with the reading load I already had for my project, in addition to the stresses of everyday life, on top of mental health concerns, I was not able to do all that I set out to do. That being said, I also set out for a very ambitious project: taking nearly everything I've ever written, throwing it all together, and seeing what the running thread was. I had 50+ pages of notes and quotes that I compiled together in order to read through it all to get to the bottom of what I was in the end trying to say. In reality, much of the academic work I was doing stemmed from my work in analysis, so sometimes it felt like a better idea to mull over a thought I was having more so than reading from the book I was supposed to be reading. Despite using a plethora of thinkers, I wanted to use their voice in the service of my own, nothing should be used that does not serve a purpose for what I was trying to say. However, I think one of the biggest struggles of my project was in working on something where I didn't exactly know what

direction I was going in. In other words, I did not want to set out with an ultimate goal in mind before I worked on the project, but I wanted to see what the theme or topic of my paper was after I set about writing it so that it came about organically rather than forced. However, this required that I also learn how to sit in the mess of my writing without pulling it all together before it was ready.

Writing is like cooking, and I had to let things marinate and cook, with the ingredients spilled all over the counters and the floors before I could actually clean up and serve the food to my guests. In many instances, I wanted to microwave the thing and be done, but I had to maintain perseverance in continuing. I am actually somewhat proud of my ability to hold a plethora of seemingly contradictory ideas in my head and allow them to fester so that I could get at something natural without forcing a tidiness that was unnatural to the project. However, if I were to have done something differently, I absolutely would have spent more time working on my capstone ahead of time – or started earlier in my academic career so that I could have built off of something over the span of 2.5 years in school. One semester is not nearly enough time to work on something of this size, especially when it felt like I was aiming to write something in the vain of Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, which is a critically acclaimed book I doubt Nelson wrote in the span of 8 weeks.

That being said, I feel that I did the best I could with the time I had in producing a work of art that I can be satisfied with. Had I managed my time better, had I read more, I could have done better work, but it’s easy to be critical of one’s work rather than accept that limitations are a part of the project. I hope as I continue I can learn to have more fun in the writing and enjoy the process more, rather than thinking about it being something so tedious.

I mentioned before that I often felt it necessary to focus on analysis more so than my project, and in many ways, what was weird about being in analysis was that I began to be less of an “intellectual” the more I went on. I use that term not in the sense that I consider myself a highly intelligent individual, but that I process information intellectually rather than intuitively,

emotionally, or somatically. Winnicott speaks of the intellectual with weariness, as someone who developed at the cost of their body. For him, the psyche-soma develop in tandem with each other, however if the infant, because of a failed early environment, believes that their desire is something persecutory rather than generative, they split off the psyche from the soma and develop the psyche at the cost of the soma. That's to say, the mind becomes the mother figure for the infant, to replace the mother they do not have. Only through analysis can the intellectual begin to regain the soma and incorporate that back so that it exists in tandem with the psyche.<sup>29</sup> In many ways, as I was finishing graduate school, and working on my thesis, my intellectual interests greatly diminished, and my sense of bodily connection increased. I realized ways that I hid behind my intellectual mask and avoided connecting with my whole self—this moment came at an inopportune time for my thesis work in that I wanted to spend time doing non-academic work and not reading and writing, which used to be my safe haven. Thus, I had to learn new ways of operating in which I was reading and writing from the psyche-soma in tandem and not one at the expense of the other. I believe with more time developing the two, I will find ways of operating in which I can integrate my love of learning and academics, where I am not sacrificing bodily knowledge, with my somatic knowledge.

Another struggle I have was in generalizing or speaking as if for all womyn in society. I understand my position as a safely queer, able bodied, white, middle-class feminist is very different from that of a womyn of color, a trans womyn, a lesbian, a working class womyn, a sex worker, a disabled womyn, etc. I did not want to speak as if from a biologically essentialist point of view, a heteronormative point of view, a classist point of view, or a racist point of view. I did not want to act as if there is one generalizable female experience, but I also wanted to discuss the experience of being a womyn in western society regarding traits or forces of oppression that are shared amongst

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<sup>29</sup> Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (Penguin Books, 2007), 96.

many groups of womyn. To speak of the particular is also to speak of the larger context, but I did not want to write as if my experience is the same as other womyn from different backgrounds. I hope I did not come across as speaking for all womyn, and yet I did want to convey a shared experience. I aim to gain critiques at a later point in time so that I can better inform my project.

### ***Continuation of the Project & Next Steps***

After this project, I strive to continue working on my capstone in the hopes I may one day make it publishable. In many ways, I see this project as far from done, as I merely stopped in order to submit in a timely fashion. I still would like to continue tidying the writing and making it more cohesive and explicit as it still feels a bit messy and too fragmented for my liking. I have not been able to fully add all of Winnicott's ideas to the writing, and that will take greater research and time which I will strive to do in the coming years. Furthermore, I would like to visit the Oskar Diethelm Library where many of his archival work is located to be able to really get in the mindset of Winnicott's work, in a way that goes beyond merely reading his published papers. Furthermore, I would like to gain access to the written records and transcripts of my analytic sessions to be able to incorporate them into the work. However, this being said, my main pursuit involves getting an MSW and becoming a licensed therapist in the state of New York. My time at CUNY has helped me realize that I my true passion is in working one on one with patients in the hopes they too work out their unconscious and conscious traumas in the hopes of a successful integration of mind and body. I will continue to keep writing, as I know I will be inspired by my patients and their voices, and I hope to continue learning how to externalize the emotionally charged information I absorb through the act of writing. In no way has my project been separate from my personal life, or my pursuit of an MSW, but has been integral for me to be able to process ideas that have plagued me for decades, ideas I needed to externalize in order to move forwards in my life without feeling held back. In many ways the words I wrote were a dead weight inside of me, needing to be vocalized,

needing to be read, needing to be validated by another. Just having that process occur has been critical in my own development as a writer, a scholar, and a womyn. I hope that my capstone can be enjoyed by those who encounter it, as it was a challenging and difficult process. Knowing that one day it might be read by someone else gives me extreme anxiety but also pleasure in knowing that in the future someone else might be writing in a similar fashion their capstone and that more types of these works will continue to go acknowledged, accepted, and encouraged in academia as a valid method of construing one's ideas.

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TO WHOM OCCURS THE HAUNTING:

A SINGULAR EXPLORATION OF A DISTURBED FEMME PSYCHE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	1
II	22
III	24
IV	27
V	57
Epilogue	60
Bibliography	62

## I.

“I am unbalanced—but I am not mad with snow / I am mad the way young girls are mad / with an offering, an offering...”<sup>1</sup>

“It seems to me more than ever that I am a victim of introspection. If I have not the power to put myself in the place of other people, but must be continually burrowing inward... I am hypnotized by the workings of the individual, alone, and am continually using myself as a specimen.”<sup>2</sup>

“Through artistic expression we can hope to keep in touch with our most primitive selves whence the most intense feelings and even fearfully acute sensation derive, and we are poor indeed if we are only sane.”<sup>3</sup>

*I've turned the corner into the unknown but am still missing. Is the point to not have a point? To wander and roam freely in the sleeping mind and in waking life so that the destination is not decreed by another, an other, but arrived at by a self? For now, I continue gliding through mazes in dreams and reality, a dream reality, a haunted life disturbed by the lives of the womyn who have come before me. For her, I remain untethered, to find our direction alas.*

It all began with a forwarded email. To me this appears a sufficiently dramatic beginning.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Sexton, *The Complete Poems* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 175.

<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Plath and Karen V. Kukil, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950-1962* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945): 150.

A distant relative from generations ago was institutionalized for unknown reasons, of this I learned from someone with whom I cannot recall the exact nature of our familial connection.

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The fact though tragic, felt like a link that connected further backwards the lineage of female instability in my family, and I clung to the trauma with clenched fists.

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Between my ancestors and me, there exists no rupture but an inherited chain that flows throughout time. We are bracketed together cycling and dancing in madness, our insanity spanning decades. So how early did the instability begin? I'm speaking both in terms of the origination of the madness as well the age at which the madness manifested itself in each womyn's life.

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Virginia Woolf is my mother - the matriarch of this project. Whether or not you notice her presence, she glides along the margins as you read, informing the words you digest, whispering into your ear to twirl, to flit, to dance, to continue moving, always moving, never stop moving.

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Thomas Hobbes once spoke of his mother's premature labor during the invasion of the Spanish Armada "And hereupon it was my mother dear / Did bring forth twins at once, both me and fear."<sup>4</sup> That is to say, a mother does not merely pass on a genetic sequencing, but also the circumstances of, not just her past, but her present as well. A swollen belly fills itself with dreams, memories, associations, and fears, swimming inside with the amniotic fluid of the infant's first home.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes and E. M. Curley, *Leviathan with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2008), Iiv.

The home in the belly, the mother as home, the infant with the mother, the home of the infant, no other psychoanalytic figure deals as extensively with these complex dynamics than Donald Woods Winnicott. A 20<sup>th</sup> century British psychiatrist, pediatrician, and psychoanalyst, Winnicott authored works that span roughly 4 decades, dealing extensively with early infantile development, and how breaks, stoppages, failures in this primary environment cause cuts, gaps, holes in what should be a fluid continuity of rapid development, thus later resulting in psychopathology.

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So what causes breaks in fluidity? It's a simple yet nuanced answer: a failed parent. The importance of a loving, caring, attentive authority figure for Winnicott *cannot* be underscored. In the case of his work, Winnicott explicitly meant that of the mother, with the father being an essentially absent figure.

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Some contemplate this being a reflection of Winnicott's own childhood and subsequent relationship with his parents, while critics take issue with this heteronormative reading of familial environments.

\*

Having an absent father and an overly impinging mother makes my emotional connection to Winnicott's work quite easy and unproblematic. I accept critiques here.

\*

Unlike Melanie Klein, a figure often critiqued for failing to incorporate the impact of familial realm on the development of an infant, Winnicott heartily makes the case of a conjoined partnership between infant and mother: "If you show me a baby you certainly show me also

someone caring for the baby, or at least pram with someone's eyes and ears glued to it. One sees a 'nursing couple.'"<sup>5</sup>

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There are a couple of key development milestones according to Winnicott which will become useful as we progress henceforth: 1) the ability to differentiate between self and other, 2) the capacity to differentiate between inside and outside, and 3) the beginning of understanding about someone else's insides (in this case, that of the mother).

\*

I worried about my mother – towards this fact I show much resistance.

\*

Growing up in a household of loud silence and silent loudness, I learned not to ask questions about the past. My understanding of my family history goes as far back as my parents, both cold, slippery shadows, and their parents, even more distant, untouchable, dead shadows.

\*

Before these developmental landmarks are met at 5-6 months, the infant lives in a liminal space, free of boundaries, and differentiations of any sort. Integration comes about only *after* a successful ability to incorporate objects and understand the difference between self and other, good and bad, and human and non-human. This achievement of being able to integrate self and other must happen in the protective holding of another.

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A crucial moment for Winnicott occurs when the infant understands they have an inside and that, "things come from outside. He shows he knows that he is enriched by what he incorporates

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<sup>5</sup> Donald W. Winnicott and Helen Taylor Robinson, "Further Thoughts on Babies as Persons," ed. Lesley Caldwell, in *The Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott: Volume 3, 1946-1951* (London: Oxford University Press), 94.

(physically and psychically).”<sup>6</sup> If all goes according to plan, life is enriching for the infant at this time period, however there is flipside to this milestone in that the infant additionally realizes that the mother too comprises of an inside and an outside, “one which may be rich or poor, good or bad, ordered or muddled. He is therefore starting to be concerned with the mother and her sanity and her moods.”<sup>7</sup>

\*

Right now, perhaps you’re feeling annoyed, asleep, or astounded at the non-genre of my writing. To be entirely honest, it matters not much to me your state of being, however to provide sufficient justification as to what continues henceforth, let me thus offer you an explanation: I dive inward to explore not only my past, but to explore the mystery of inherited cultural trauma and how one pieces together fragments in desperate searches for a unified self and a narrative whole on which to stand firmly planted to this otherwise shaking earth. Winnicott, like Woolf, so too shall be our guide.

\*

As you can see, I have created my own family, for this is play time and I decide who dines at the table of my imagination. Woolf, Winnicott, Plath, Butler, Anzaldúa, Sedgwick, Lispector, their voices inform my own, allowing me to unpack my voice, so that I may create, as Mark McBeth refers to, a “psycho-genealogy”: a family tree which tracks the neural networks of the matriarchal line.

\*

If only I had the time to unpack the paternal line, but father does not incite the same amount of anger. Including him would have cut into my much-needed shopping time.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945): 148.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

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Sylvia Plath in her *Unabridged Journals* confronts the insecurity around the ambiguity of selfhood when she writes: “I am afraid to face myself. Tonight I am trying to do so. I heartily wish that there was some absolute knowledge, some person whom I could trust to evaluate me and tell me the truth.”<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, life does not grant absolute kernels of knowledge, though my brain will never stop spinning amidst the search.

\*

Being able to realize the mother is her own person with her own moods is both a turning point, and success, but also a danger, for if the infant can become aware of the moods of the mother, this means that the mother begins to play a seminal role in what type of environment she is creating for the infant. For Winnicott, an infant becoming aware of the needs of the mother over their own results in the creation of a false self, a self devoid from their own personal desires because of the subsequent adaption to the needs of the demanding mother. I have a very convincing, and incredibly well-dressed false self.

\*

A parent must piece together the infant like a puzzle, gathering their bits into a cohesive whole so that the infant may begin the task of self-integration. If this does not occur, if the parent is absent, aloof, or overly demanding, the infant may not be able to “maintain integration with confidence.”<sup>9</sup> Reading Winnicott, I ask myself, what happens when one cannot remember any presences at all? Or when those presences are of another sort of human, maybe even a non-human being? And what

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<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Plath and Karen V. Kukil, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950-1962* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 98.

<sup>9</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945): 150.

if the scraps looking to be held stares in the face of another fractured being whose bits are too laying on the living room floor?

\*

To be aware of madness at 5 or 6 months....I never stood a chance at sanity. Because the roots of my madness stem from being raised by a traumatized child wearing the body of a mother, who then traumatized my childhood. In many areas, her development halted prematurely, so who's to say that she was not raised by a traumatize mother with the same pathological roots the extends generations? My pathology is potentially inherited by decades of mad womyn.

\*

One day, I would like to see through the fog of my perception to get to the bottom of things. As of now, I'm painting uncertain brushstrokes on a blotchy canvas with masochism, narcissism, and hysteria.

\*

Sometimes, often, I desire a stalker. Someone to have videotaped my entire life—the whole gamut. She /He / They would hand over my past in the shape of a visible tape, a tape I would watch with or without the stalker. Through the viewing, my past would become an object—not necessarily round or rectangular—but still whole, tangible, witness-able.

\*

Yet again I digress, so let us return to the aim, the goal, the purpose of my writing. I explain to you now the wish to explore my psyche in attempts to understand how the hardwiring of my brain predates not only my birth, but that of my mother, her mother, and all of the femmes who have come before me in the family lineage. History, herstory imprinted itself into the fibers that constitute my brain.

\*

To prove the pursuit valid, I grant you some guiding questions: How are notions of normal and abnormal behavior gendered? To what extent has the hegemonic state contributed to womyn's oppression? What is the result of the historical invasion of the internal self by external power structures? How has generational silencing and gaslighting of womyn had a lasting impact on their development?

\*

In other words, I do not begin with DNA but with a genetic sequencing that situates itself inside, alongside, with history. Scholars call this congruence epigenetics; The internal (ego) and external (social) are no longer separate but irreparably intertwined, therefore preventing one from reaching a feeling of totality or ownership over one's self. Instead, one exists on the border of realness as a half-dead, half-living, non-being.

\*

So what do we do with partial non-beings living on the border, the border of... Life and death, sanity and insanity, self and other, genius and madness. Furthermore, of what is her diagnosis? Biological, neurochemical, genetic, societal, where does the root begin? To me, the only plant I grow in this text is one of actuality. She is real, the pain is valid, the emptiness is evident. The diagnosis is...

**BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE.**

**Diagnostic Criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder As per the DSM-V <sup>10</sup>**

A pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.

Note: Do not include suicidal or self-mutilating behaviour covered in Criterion 5.

2. A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationship characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation.

3. Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self

4. Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating).

Note: Do not include suicidal or self-mutilating behaviour covered in Criterion 5.

5. Recurrent suicidal behaviour, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behaviour

6. Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days).

7. Chronic feelings of emptiness

8. Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g. frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights).

9. Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms.

**BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE**

<sup>10</sup> Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5 (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE.**

**BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE. BORDERLINE**

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Harsh words, am I right? Borderlines are tricksters, posing like marble statues but living like hollow donuts – to practitioners, she is tasty but without any cream filling.

\*

Adolph Stern originally deployed the term Borderline Personality to explain the “‘borderline state’ between psychosis and neurosis.”<sup>11</sup> Years later, Helen Deutsch defined the term as bordering on schizophrenia “elucidating a character type she called the ‘as if’ personality who functioned ‘as if’ everything were normal but lived ‘a sham existence.’”<sup>12</sup>

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Venomous anger wears like latex on my oiled skin/who is not a pyromaniac?

\*

*So I spit venom in your face to teach you of your own insanity. You come to me looking to claim your own madness, and I'm unafraid of undressing my spite for you to realize the ambiguity of your own frail existence between life and death. I'm undaunted by the liminal spaces where darkness smells wet and scary, where I breathe and rot simultaneously. And there's a reason you flock to me, because you secretly desire to go there too. Womyn have been here for centuries, but our silent screams only distantly reach the surface through the hidden mimicry of laughs and winks. You've heard us though, and you know you're envious of what you lack and we gain. So give me madness. Give me insanity. Give me borderline. I'm unafraid to straddle the middles of existence, an existence that contains blood and death. Why don't you come join me? You know you want to.*

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<sup>11</sup> CAHN, SUSAN K. "Border Disorders: Mental Illness, Feminist Metaphor, and the Disordered Female Psyche in the Twentieth-Century United States." In *Disability Histories*, edited by BURCH SUSAN and REMBIS MICHAEL, 258-82. (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 261. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt6wr5rt.18>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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And yet, despite the anger, the confident shield of artificial defense mechanisms, we both know she is breakable underneath, a tragic figure in her own life story, banging on locked cell doors for someone to hear her mute voice if only for a second out of the desperate dry deserted day. Dolls are both angry and plastic, wouldn't you say?

\*

A research study of patients with BPD gave insight into the condition of what it feels like to be borderline, often utilizing: “the image of being ‘skinless,’ [and] feeling every emotional sensation as if through nerve endings ‘raw and vulnerable to even a feather’s touch.’ This intensity of feeling combined with variability of mood is at times pleasurable but mostly destabilizing, likened to living in a ‘world that can shift with a breeze.’<sup>13</sup>

\*

*This is a state without fingernails, yet I still prefer these bottom layers, I prefer the real reality – not the shell we’ve created to live in. Show me those naked truths, for I’m here skinless and floating in the pool of wait, hungry for your statements, and thoughts, and bare boned answers to how life inside you really feels. I may be an alien to your insides, but I wait in the darkness for your mind’s prepared mouth to communicate whatever it is got buried below. My wind blows all lies away, so tell me a truth. Any truth. Your truth. And I will try to do the same.*

\*

Continuing with her pleas, the womyn’s voices seem to echo the DSM-5 definition, but in a manner that humanized the dark and dreary words of the mainly white male dominated field of psychiatry: “‘At my core, I’d feared being nobody.’ Others envisioned the ‘nothingness’ as a deep,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 266.

dark hole, a ‘hole that can never be truly filled, simply due to the fact that everything you place within it disappears so quickly.’”<sup>14</sup>

\*

Was not joking when I said a hollow donut.

\*

*I didn't realize analysis would crush everything I've held to be true. The things that I hold dearly, exposing them to be artifice I've built to hide the fear underneath. The fear of what would happen in a different reality, a reality of which I have no understanding. An unknown path that could have been but was not. Lying back on a couch I watch my beliefs crumbling, witness my personal ideologies shattered and brushed away. What a destructive process! And now I have to look at what's really been there all along, even though the artifice was my security blanket, my safety net, my teddy bear. Except, those ideologies were never verifiably safe or reliable, or they would not crumble so easily. I hate being made to disintegrate, to see the lineage of nervous suburban housewives crying under my feet, a foundation built upon relation to fragile abusive exploitative others.*

\*

The term borderline deals not only with spatiality – the border of psychosis and neurosis – but with temporality as well – a historical lineage of traumatized womyn, a great many of whom have been sexually assaulted. In other words, as Cahn notes borderline is a:

...[C]onceptual space women use to try to comprehend their own bewildering psychic agony. It also provides a designated set of behaviors that bring attention to the ways women try to communicate their pain and solve emotional conundrums. Asking whether this makes

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

BPD a 'real' illness misses the point. It is real in the sense that a wide and contradictory collection of behaviors and expressed emotions form enough of a pattern that psyprofessionals knit them together into some recognizable 'it' that garners the label borderline...BPD implies expertise about extremely painful psychic experiences that in reality continue to baffle experts.<sup>15</sup>

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Living a sham existence, she runs into the street screaming for someone to fuck her. Or is that the neighborhood histrionic? In agreeance with Cahn, the patterns are baffling, the delineations tenuous, while the psychic pain is undeniably real.

\*

If the notion of borderline implicates a sense of psychic spatiality (part psychotic / part neurotic) that demarcates agony and emptiness, then so too her body becomes a vessel of emptiness, as well as the spaces her body inhabits. Thus, what she becomes, the home becomes. Or is it as Betty Friedan implies, the reverse? A body attached to the home floats like a lethal ether amongst the rooms she decorates with salt and skin flakes.

\*

Friedan notes in her seminal work 1963, *The Feminine Mystique*:

It is urgent to understand how the very condition of being a housewife can create a sense of emptiness, non-existence, nothingness, in women. There are aspects of the housewife role that make it almost impossible for a woman of adult intelligence to retain a sense of human identity, the firm core of self or 'I' without which a human being, man or woman, is not

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 269.

truly alive. For women of ability, in America today, I am concerned that there is something about the housewife state itself that is dangerous.<sup>16</sup>

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*What would happen if all of us were forced to stand on our own, the womyn and me. Lock ourselves in a solitary room and realize we were singular bodies. First and foremost. Not disregard humanity, rather affirm one's body in the context of a universal reality (if there is such a thing?). I'm tired of being a we, an it, a you, I want to be an I.*

\*

Taking this idea of sheer boredom driving on the extreme mundane, one wonders who would not feel depressed and empty being relegated to the confines of four walls day in and day out. Thus, is it not possible, even likely that certain female anger is not itself an internal issue, but an internalized response to repeated external oppression by the hegemony?

\*

Looking back to my childhood, I only vaguely recall the physical presence of my mother. She remained an omnipotent atmosphere in the house, as her drool dribbled on every porous surface of the space, including one's body and personal belongings, and yet her physical remains continue absent from memory. That is to say, she was simultaneously everywhere and nowhere in the home, an invasively abandoning presence, leaving one filled to the brim, intestines expanding with nothingness. There were no boundaries within the confinement of our home; inside the four walls all was leaky. Was this because her body lacked a center? She was in fact the leader of the home. The definer of what home meant, despite there being other inhabitants. Was it because she could not be reminded of the trapped abuse of her childhood, so she fluidly spread herself throughout the

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<sup>16</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 264.

creaks and underneath shut bedroom doors into one's personal territory? If she could not have privacy, neither would you. Or was it because the role of mother and housewife felt so stifling, that even indoors she needed to metaphorically break down walls to feel a sense of liberty?

\*

*For a womyn without borders, the home becomes the space where she may be contained. Confined into a box, the four walls encapsulate her fear of total annihilation and disintegration.*

\*

Taking the matter of integration at hand, Winnicott argues that there is a primary state of unintegration to which all beings are capable of regressing to, rather than an ordinary state of integration: "It may be assumed that at the theoretical start the personality is unintegrated, and that in regressive disintegration there is a primary state to which regression leads. We postulate a primary unintegration."<sup>17</sup> The danger therefore is not of living unintegrated, which is in fact primary to our nature, but of being afraid of living unintegrated. Thus, during periods of madness, disintegration is a return to this primary state of being, rather than a disintegration of an integrated state.

\*

For myself and for Winnicott, the goal is to learn to live safely integrated *and* unintegrated, untethered, and in bits. For many whose early infantile environment failed them, living unintegrated or disintegrating to an unintegrated state is a reminder of fear, helplessness, and lack of control.

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<sup>17</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945): 149.

“There are long stretches of time in a normal infant’s life in which a baby does not mind whether he is in many bits or one whole being, or whether he lives in his mother’s face or in his own body, provided that from time to time he comes together and feels something.”<sup>18</sup> For what if an infant comes together and feels horror? *Holding my niece like she’s a sack of rotting potatoes, it seems as if my father has never held a baby before. He’s afraid and uncomfortable. Disconcerting to see as his daughter and fourth child.* What if while living in the face of the mother, the infant feels fear? Although unspecified, there seems to be something implied in a notion of love being a holding factor for this safety in transitioning between integrated and unintegrated states of being.

\*

It shall seem that some babies never come together and feel alive, instead existing entirely separated, spliced, penetrable, attacked, and persecuted by the outside world. Again, the issue is not in living in bits, the issue is in the association of fear with unintegration. As long as once in a while the infant comes back together and feels (validated) by their cohesion, there’s no reason they cannot remove the arm from the socket and dance in the fire of their dreams.

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*With you, I leave my arms on the couch while we dance on our toes. Armless, you hold me around the ribcage, swinging me in spirals as I bend backwards to the carpet and transistor radio while the glass eye that’s either yours or mine rolls along the edge of the carpet, knocking against the baseboard until it shatters or slips back into the original eye socket. I’m a mannequin that’s grown bones, your claws hooked to the gaps between hardened calcium as my insides expand outside the flesh and tear open the skin to reveal the fragments previous swallowed.*

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 150.

Staring at a hole in the wall, my analyst asks of me of what I'm thinking. *The Yellow Wallpaper*, I reply. So another obsessive womyn, she retorts.

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I recall the vomit stained wallpaper of my mother's miniscule bathroom, the place she'd mutely shower while I re-read Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham* from memory. I'm still unsure whether at that point I knew how to read or had merely memorized every word as a companion to my loneliness.

\*

"Even the compound noun by which she is described, 'housewife', weds woman to home, conjoining place and status in a way that implies an uncanny, reciprocal bleed between that which is alive (namely the 'wife') and that which is demonstrably inanimate (the 'house')." <sup>19</sup> Subject becomes object, object subject. Where does one end and the other begin?

\*

Her very identity rests on a border of a place. The ego is defined in relation to an object, a space, a place, rather than being isolated and free of circumstance.

\*

In Winnicott's 1974 piece "Fear of Breakdown", this environment of holding to which I have previously alluded, one of love and support that allows the baby to come together and feel something in transition from living in bits, is referred to as a "facilitating environment":

The individual inherits a maturation process. This carries the individual along in so far as there exists a facilitating environment and only in so far as this exists...the essential feature

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<sup>19</sup> Munford, Rebecca, and Melanie Waters. "Haunted Housewives and the Postfeminist Mystique." In *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjxmj.8>.

is that it has a kind of growth of its own, being adapted to the changing needs of growing individual. The individual proceeds from absolute dependence to relative independence and towards independence. In health the development takes place at a pace that does not outstrip the development of complexity in the mental mechanisms.<sup>20</sup>

If an infant lives in an ordinary state of unintegration, they exist in total dependence to this facilitating environment—hence the significant impact of a dangerous, toxic, or failed atmosphere or upbringing on the infant’s development. Through Winnicott’s language one imagines the slow tearing away of mother and baby, their arms originally intermingled, the infant unknowing in where their arm ends and their mother’s begins, while eventually their parts separate, bit by bit. The mother distant but always near, allows for the child to live in bits, to fantasize, create, and use objects within that fantasy, allowing their environment to grow outside of the mother’s holding.

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And yet, if the infant has not “come together and felt something” frequently enough, or in other words, is not held and then handled enough, the psyche will not develop itself on sufficiently stabilized grounding to later in life be able to transition between this spliced existence with ease and maybe even enjoyment or pleasure.

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And yet in many ways, all people need facilitating environments, not merely infants. A cozy home makes the hardships of life worth living.

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<sup>20</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Fear of Breakdown," *Int. Rev. Psycho-Anal.* 1 (1974): 103.

Mumford and Waters refer to the blurring distinction between the home and female womb in their discussion of the uncanny:

...[W]hat is *Heimlich* [familiar] can very quickly become *unheimlich* [uncanny]. Indeed, it is the womb, that most homely of places ‘which had originally nothing terrifying about it’, that Freud regards as ‘the most uncanny thing of all’. Freud’s delineation of the uncanny fosters an intentional confusion between rooms and wombs, in which the distinctions between the two break down and the spaces of the home begin to converge with those of the female body.<sup>21</sup>

Even inside her domain, the relationship between self and object remains unclear. Whose womb do visitors walk into when crossing the threshold of the front door? Is there even a separation between my bed and my mother’s scared body? Was I sleeping on a bed of her trauma all along?

\*

The mother too needs a womb, a place of comfort, somewhere to feel guarded—especially when one doesn’t feel safe in her own body. And yet, even if she searches for a womb she can climb into, she herself still symbolizes home and womb for others, thus the boundaries once again between place and body disintegrate.

\*

When she gives confessions, a child appears in place. Abruptly walking into my childhood bedroom, another space she dominated as that of her own, Mother sits frenetic and cross-legged to spurt out an isolated fact she chooses late in life to randomly reveal. The instances are rare and always discomfoting, particularly because she’s looking for comfort, and the only response I can

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<sup>21</sup> Mumford, 91.

grant is anger. Although currently her perception of reality has distanced further and further from the similar “facts” my siblings and I share in our subjective realities, it is hard to believe this extreme dissociation from reality has occurred from the beginning of her existence, rather than the more likely fact that early sexual trauma coupled with psychological and verbal abuse caused her borders of selfhood to blur the dissolve between real and imaginary from an early age.

\*

Cahn aptly reverses the role of which party struggles with borders in cases of sexual assault: “...it is the perpetrator who ‘lacks boundaries,’ committing criminal and harmful violations of the child’s physical and psychic boundaries. These acts cause severe childhood trauma that often persists in adulthood. But in the language of psychiatry, the reified depersonalized figure of the ‘borderline’ buries both the doer and the deed”.<sup>22</sup>

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To what extent can one hold someone accountable for being narcissistically fluid, when they never learned that bodies are meant to be separate? The one who broke the barrier was not my mother but the abuser. Who would not run to the border of existence to escape the trauma of inhumane bodily violation and the forced merging of boundaries?

\*

However, despite this setback of broken boundaries, does there not lie the potential for easier access to liberation? For Gloria Anzaldúa, one must expand beyond the here and now, the container of our soul:

*You’re not contained by your skin—you exist outside your body, and outside your dreambody as well. If the body is energy, is spirit – it doesn’t have boundaries....What if*

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<sup>22</sup> Cahn, 271.

freedom from categories occurs by widening the psyche / body's borders, widening the consciousness that senses self...? It follows that if you're not contained by your race, class, gender, or sexual identity, the body must be more than the categories that mark you.<sup>23</sup>

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Anzaldúa continues, "Empowerment is the bodily feeling of being able to connect with inner voices / resources (images, symbols, beliefs, memories) during periods of stillness, silence, and deep listening or with kindred others in collective actions...Este modo de capacitar comes from accepting your own authority to direct rather than letting others run you."<sup>24</sup>

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And yet how does one escape a seemingly inescapable identity? What do I *do* with my mother's madness, her mother's madness, etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. and how can I stop it from wreaking havoc on my brain? To what extent can I avoid a history that seeks to pull me into the quicksand with the rest? And how can I accept my own authority when my authority exists inside a society that I never took part in creating? Being haunted is as much an academic pursuit as a personal one.

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<sup>23</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 555.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 571.

## II.

*“But what happens when women try to live according to an image that makes them deny their minds? What happens when women grow up in an image that makes them deny the reality of the changing world?”*<sup>25</sup> Her misery was too acute to pass unbeknownst by any party in the dollhouse. The incessantly silent screams of our leader served as the white noise background music at the dinner table, as the half human-half dolls looked around in awe at the prison cell only their leader was stuck inside. *“Most adjusted to their role and suffered or ignored the problem that has no name. It can be less painful, for a woman, not to hear the strange, dissatisfied voice stirring within her.”*<sup>26</sup> Us toys unconsciously acted out the roles their doll boss orchestrated to feel some form of entertainment and control – we were the anecdote to her perpetual loneliness and commiseration. *“‘After a while your mind becomes a blank,’ they said. ‘You can’t concentrate on anything. It’s like sleepwalking.’”*<sup>27</sup> One night a doll even awoke to feel her skin being torn open in a surgical attempt to sew their body parts together, a method the cutter envisioned would permit crawling out of her flesh and into the inanimate body of her toy daughter’s burgeoning womb. *“...love has customarily been defined, at least for women, as a complete merging of egos and a loss for separateness – ‘togetherness’ – a giving up of individuality rather than a strengthening of it.”*<sup>28</sup> Despite this attempt at contriving a mother-daughter conjoined twinship, somehow her daughter, another descendant of the female lineage of entrapment, one day retained human legs to be able to walk out the door, pop off her button eyes, and sprint away forever. Unfortunately, the daughter’s former playmate never did leave, and all that’s left of her inside the plastic artificial home her doctor gave her from the toyshop, is the gaping wound leftover when she cut herself open in her attempts to breakout from the prison. From

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<sup>25</sup> Friedan, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 312

my nightmares, I see her lying down on the fainting couch, still bleeding from that pseudo suicide, with no hopes of exit until death. *“As if waking from a coma, they ask, ‘Where am I...what am I doing here?’”*<sup>29</sup> To want to become another, one has to want to kill oneself first. I never realized until later that she was the only doll in the doll’s house, the children were always real boys and girls. *“Like Peter Pan, they must remain young, while their children grow up with the world.”*<sup>30</sup> My Mother, disillusioned from decades of boredom and self-loathing, thought if she could trick us into thinking we were marionettes, she might not be alone forever. *“‘The Mother Who Ran Away.’ To their amazement it brought the highest readership of any article they had ever run.”*<sup>31</sup> Some days I still look at my veins and wonder if those are really just stitches, and that deep down I’m just another half-alive, half-dead doll stuck inside a dimly lit prison cell with a bleeding mother to keep me company. Womyn can only reach a threshold until escape is not an option but immanent, but that doesn’t mean the escapee doesn’t live a day without smelling the blood of those sacrificed before her. *A crises, “has grown worse with each succeeding generation, and will not end until they, or their daughters, turn an unknown corner and make of themselves and their lives the new image that so many women now so desperately need.”*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 72.

### III.

Sometimes I fool myself into thinking I can tap into “it”. The “it” Virginia Woolf talks about, the **it** we aim for but cannot reach. The *it* which is the substance of a global reality, a collective actuality, a substantive fluid pervasive permeable flexible albeit violent veracity we desire to shatter with hammers if only to break into that window which denies entryway but still permits a viewpoint that still cannot be grasped.

*Rather than run from the fear of an unattainable existence, sometimes I falsely believe I can high dive into an empty cement pool head first or rub exposed knees tirelessly on a carpet until the flesh melts from repeated friction. Sometimes the attempt works, but this time the slasher soundtrack I used to bobble my limbs to an internal pulsating aggression lasted only seconds, only for me to realize moments later that the target of my repulsion and narcissistic sexual objectification was only a teenager. A helpless victim who's neck I tried slicing with the piercingly sharp jolt of my head, a motion so rapid the microfibers of my hair sliced his skin like a warm knife cutting through soft cheese, only to leave him dirty and decapitated underneath my wide mouth laughing. So why is he only an adolescent and where did the anger go? I only noticed his age when my skin peeled away during the return of my gray frail body: otherwise known as paranoia's toy made of mushy bones and boiling blood. I preferred this stranger when he was merely an anonymous primate with a desire for me I could manipulate and torture like a mouse slowly being poisoned by its own mother. What is it about dark enclosed spaces that makes my outline erase to reveal fuming guts and loose blood hounds? And why do I use strangers as targets, beings at which I only glance sideways so I can avoid the direct fact of their existence to my attempt at omnipotence over trauma. Looking at their body above the eyes ruins the falsity and reminds me my feet are still stick in cement blocks that prevent leaving this metal box altogether.*

Other times I feel left out, locked out, screaming to get inside “it”, to feel, to sense, to rub against “it”, but all that remains is an empty world devoid of sensation and any yearning.

*Maybe it is paranoia, but sometimes I feel I'm watching the waves from the outside, as I grasp at my head, spinning. Is that the grey me, dulled and free of poetry, music, and swimming. No more free flow into the text when I could breathe with the words. When the phrases and scenes lunged into my eye's tears and lit the flame in my lungs. I'm spinning and yelling outside the door, pounding to get inside, trying to comprehend a solid idea, something entire, whole that I can take in my hands and place into my mind – to spin the wheel into circulation. The blood doesn't boil and all seems without color. She moves the top layer of sand but the roots remain untouched, and I can't even cry or see the mosaic of paintings I used to think were sent to light my spark. There existed a link between us, a switch only she could flip, but instead it seems not that the light is broken, but that a permanent dimmer installed itself and only I can see through fog. Even the clouds have left me today, and the chirping birds do not annoy me. I have lost the ability to react or respond positively or negatively. My mouth is mute, and my jaw is clenched. If only I could scream, or at least fix the light. I would have preferred a broken one, for its better to repair something than to have a ship flying at half-mast, moving half-speed against the wind, alone. I want to be with the current again. Somebody hit me, pierce me, stab me, throw ice or a flame at my face. Maybe violence can open my eyes, or maybe the flame will thaw my lids—trapped behind solid glaciers obstructing my arrow, my firework, and coloring my lens with a gray cellophane. I miss opening presents and feeling surprised, but instead the dolls screams within which only I can hear—though only an echo reaches me. The muffled distant siren fills my chamber mind, giving me a headache, and enveloping voices, sounds, cries, and callings. I did not realize my own responses, replies, and sounding opinions cannot make it out alive from Dante's Inferno. The medicine set up an obstacle course that my mind, soul, and body cannot pass. The me, the composite purple of my self (now*

*past self?) stays behind a curtain that covers a locked, trapped door. I just want to find myself again, hear my voice, feel my dance, see my pathway and my fellow herdsmen. Instead I'm locked away and a pretty zombie who can imitate smiling takes her place. Oh! Where did I go? I never realized how much of a mystery novel this game would become.*

#### IV.

“The dream, far from being the confusion of haphazard and meaningless associations...is an autonomous and meaningful product of psychic activity, susceptible, like all other psychic functions, of systematic analysis.”<sup>33</sup>

“...children depend very much on adults for getting to know their dreams. It is normal for small children to have anxiety dreams and terrors. At these times children need someone to help them remember what they dreamed. It is a valuable experience whenever a dream is both dreamed and remembered, precisely because of the breakdown of dissociation that this represents.”<sup>34</sup>

“For those whose ‘I’ is dead we can do nothing, absolutely nothing. We never know, however, whether in a particular person the ‘I’ is quite dead or only inanimate. If it is not quite dead, love can reanimate it as though by an injection, but it must be love which is utterly pure without the slightest trace of condescension, for the least shade of contempt drives towards death.

When the ‘I’ is wounded from the outside it starts by revolting in the most extreme and bitter manner like an animal at bay. But as soon as the ‘I’ is half dead, it wants to be finished off and allows itself to sink into unconsciousness. If it is then awakened by a touch of love, there is sharp pain which result in anger and sometimes hatred for whoever has provoked this pain. Hence the apparently inexplicable vindictiveness of the fallen towards their benefactors.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> C. G. Jung, Sonu Shamdasani, and Richard Francis Carrington Hull, *Dreams* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945): 151.

<sup>35</sup> Simone Weil et al., *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 2002), 29.

*Collective and singular, temporal and a-historical, realistic and fantastical – nightmares are many things. Mine is a story about losing sleep and losing minds, about haunted female ancestors known and unknown who lie at the threshold of my consciousness waiting to speak through this frail medicated body. Tis not a beautiful fairytale of a womyn’s coming into a being, but a tale of destroying the self and destroying others – others who exist outside the psyche and who have been internalized, introjected into my being. Fictionalized and intentionally hysterical, the narrative is not merely my own but a collective hysteria, a unified hysteria, a transgenerational hysteria for and on behalf of the female ancestors who’ve come before me. She was mad, I am mad, we are mad....*

I shall henceforth begin an analysis of my nightmare world, a period of sleep when my consciousness awakens to see and breathe. Dreaming, I feel alive and aware; awake I feel asleep and unknowingly, unwittingly alone.

\*

While sitting on the train I imagine my death: the embodied definition of *daymare*: the daydream turned nightmare imagined during waking life.

\*

It’s not only at night that I haunt myself.

\*

“...the biology of the nightmare may also lead us to an understanding of the underlying biology of boundaries in the mind.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ernest Hartmann, *The Nightmare: The Psychology and Biology of Terrifying Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 9.

\*

So begins the beginning, we shall thus spiral backwards in a slow disintegration towards the start of it all. Will you join me?

\*

Upon returning from Latin America, the nightmares began, at first periodically, and then multiple times a night. The first one was vividly in color, sonorous with my screams. My brother molesting me while I yelled for help to no avail.

\*

The research on nightmares significantly lacks, except in the context of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I do not believe I have PTSD, though of that I am not entirely sure. Shall we consult the nightmare archive, the oracle of my life story? Its orb is made of obsidian.

\*

Dr. Ernest Hartmann, a noted dream researcher and medical expert offers two explanations for the lack of research into bad dreams: "...[W]e do not like being frightened, and we do not like being helpless and out of control."<sup>37</sup>

\*

The more I lost control in my twenties, the more frequently I cut my hair. Reader, do you grind your teeth and clench your fists too?

\*

"...[P]ersons with a lifelong history of frequent nightmares were unusually open and undefended in their mental structure, with a tendency both to mental illness (schizophrenia) and to artistic expression."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 39.

\*

According to the psychoanalytic mindset, once I resolve the unconscious matter I'm repressing in my waking life, allowing the unconscious material to slither into my conscious mind, I'll finally get a good night's sleep. But if it was that simple, why would I have paid for half a decade of therapy at this point?

\*

"Dreaming has a meaning, like everything else we do."<sup>39</sup> But does everything have a meaning or is that my mania speaking? Do not forget I am mental.

\*

The only information I found on the types of nightmares I was having appeared on forums for borderline personality disorder. Reading the comments of stress induced intensified night visions, I was put at ease. My brethren spoke of their sweat and I laid back on my pillow with a deep sigh.

\*

"It was striking how often the nightmares involved generalized fears – probably childhood fears – such as being chased, being attacked, the body coming apart or being cut apart, even though there was no history of any specific traumatic event related to these themes."<sup>40</sup>

\*

To be clear, I was never molested (as far as I can remember). Though thinking I had been eventually landed me on anti-psychotics.

\*

One day Kathleen insinuated my phobia might be a reality, that maybe I was in fact molested. The moment felt as though a figure of authority whom I entrusted told a small child that the boogie man

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<sup>39</sup> Jung, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Hartmann, 62.

was in fact hiding under the bed, that there was a monster in the closet, and that there really was someone lurking outside your bedroom window.

\*

I once celebrated the feeble flimsy boundary between sanity and insanity, before realizing that some people are just more attached to reality than others. Some of you read the book of life and understand the text, while others create the written word and still fear turning the pages.

\*

“Their dreams are not bounded in the usual sense: the nightmares themselves can be seen as a failure to keep dangerous and frightening material out of dreams in a way that most of us are able to do.”<sup>41</sup>

\*

For years I’ve created my own language to life – a life of fear and paranoia in which I was assaulted. What I can’t figure out is if the molestation is real, or whether the later sexual assault is in fact assault.

\*

Right before the nightmares started I was taken to one room while being told I was going to another. I would have preferred the latter, but in reality, I was taken to the former.

\*

At this point, I am unable to determine the intentionality behind the confusion I aim to convey. Am I dictating my state of being as I perceive it to be, which is that of confusion, or am I manipulating you to feel as bewildered as I am.

\*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 104.

Recently, I entered into a pseudo-abusive relationship in which I was entirely unaware whether I was the victim or abuser. No that is not a simple question and answer.

\*

Clutching my tiger's eye to my forehead, I re-wrote the same plotline repeatedly for a day, hoping in the end to gain insight, or a sense of awareness on the matter. Instead I dove deeper into insanity.

\*

If you want to know what happened, I became scared one night and left. Sickly, I still miss the relationship—I long to be attacked and subsequently aroused—we all find comfort in the familiar, even if it's perverse.

\*

“Many [nightmare sufferers] saw themselves as rebels or ‘outsiders’ to a greater or lesser extent. Some of them actively rejected society—materialism, mediocrity, bourgeois values, and so on – while others saw themselves more as rejected by society. Most, as we shall see, felt from childhood on that they were a little different from other people.”<sup>42</sup>

\*

Although reality is subjective, it is also objective. Some witness objectivity, experience the truths of daily life better than others, and that is what psychoanalysts would call *Reality testing*: the ability to objectively understand external reality, or at least as close to the general consensus of what's occurring outside the self.

\*

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 66.

Kathleen, my analyst, had no idea how poor my reality testing was, nor did she realize her suggestion of potential molestation set me onto a path of a complete and total psychotic breakdown. Alas, I fooled her, but not for the better.

\*

Have I fooled you, or are you now a fool like me?

\*

Dreams, like reality, are multi-layered, filled with a multiplicity of meanings that can assist in understanding one's waking life.

\*

These layers of meaning in dreams are referred to, according to Freud, as *manifest content* and *latent content*. Manifest content obscures, obfuscates, confuses, clouds. "It is the façade behind which [s]he looks for what is essential"<sup>43</sup> ; whereas *Latent content* is the hidden or repressed thought, that which connects with the wish fulfillment of the dreamer.

\*

And yet, not only are the dreams themselves multi-layered, subsequently so are the conscious perceptions of the dreamer in her open-eyed day. What happens when one's horrid waking life is filled with circus lights and freak-show sidekicks, just like the *manifest content* of the dreams?

\*

Do you understand the vicious cycle I'm trying to tell you, reader? The haunted dreams disturb waking life: the agitated waking life feeds the parasitic dreams: thus, both reality and fantasy, daytime and nighttime, consciousness and unconsciousness, transform into a never-ending universe of nightmares. As I mentioned before, it's not only at night that I haunt myself.

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<sup>43</sup> Jung, 3.

\*

***Fantasy:** a notion that things will work out well. A dreamland where objects merge together without managing to lose any qualities of their own. That their shapes will come together and smile. But things do not smile except in fantasy. Real smiles, the opposite of fantasy smiles, are evil. Fantasies are not like smiles, they are like grins. Mean grins, or grins that throw vinegar on your wound and laugh as you are dragged by a skateboard on AstroTurf or gravel or stones or stony waters. So laughing. Yes, there is laughing in fantasies, but the grins hide behind rocks. The rocks cover the grins and the fantasy remains ethereal. So fantasies have rocks that hide grins, and objects merge together, without the vinegar and the AstroTurf and the stony water. Fantasies mean reunions. Meetings. Mergers. Nothing loses itself, but things are gained. Enhanced. Vivified. You were in my fantasy, but you are not in my reality. The grin popped out, or did the stone throw it at me, and the fantasy died. Fantasies are not real and they die.*

\*

Jung postulates that all dreams are dreamt for a specific reason, for if this was not so there would be a breakdown in the law of causality. But what if you do not ascribe to the law of causality? What if you're schizophrenic and laws of reality do not apply?

\*

And yet when I was psychotic, my entire reality *did* boil down to causality. What I thought was real and what I imagined was true. Thought equaled reality. Subjectivity equaled objectivity. My half-assed reality testing completely broke down and I could not understand that life existed outside of my head and its manic creations.

\*

Has this text become another manic creation, or am I on to something? The line between genius and madness has never been one for me to discover effortlessly.

\*

However even before this tipping point, my reality has always been entirely fluid, malleable, and subjective.

\*

In the past, I celebrated the honor of permeable flexibility as I cried into Virginia Woolf's kindred recognition of the subjectivity of humanity's external circumstances. The collective could become singular, and the singular magical. For us, the pencils danced, the walls licked, and bodies merged together.

\*

“Our life is spent in struggles for the realization of our wishes: all our actions proceed from the wish that something should or should not come to pass.”<sup>44</sup>

\*

What should not come to pass is sexual assault. Or verbal abuse. Or psychosis.

\*

When I began to entirely dissociate from reality, I no longer recognized my “flexible” reality testing as a feat, instead I wanted my feet firmly planted on the ground with the rest of the sane-os.

\*

Sociopaths refer to non-sociopaths as empaths.

\*

Surely out of good conscious, my mother thought to ask my brother directly whether something ever happened. To build trust amongst the kids she assured herself... not, of course, to further tear

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 5.

apart her progeny so that nothing obstructed or inhibited their love and appreciation for the maternal.

\*

Mother is an undiagnosed borderline narcissist. Experimental analysis goes against the idea of strict diagnosis, but as the saying goes, like mother like daughter.

\*

“If we cannot fulfill a wish in reality, we realize it at least in fantasy.”<sup>45</sup>

\*

In her fantasy, she’s loved by all; in my fantasy, I was molested.

\*

Jung a lá Freud speaks of the idea of the *ensor*. The inhibiting factor that prevents the recognition of wish fulfillment because it’s too painful, so the desire remains repressed.

\*

Too bad none of the children got that memo about maternal love.

\*

My next-door neighbor, the old man I suspected of having molested me as a child used to drool shirtless on the sidewalk, tanning in the sun while writing scribbled notes about my infantile beauty. From the window, I’d watch him shove the yellow papers into our mailbox tin before walking slowly down the endlessly long labyrinth of a driveway to his home. Don was a WWII veteran, or so I recall. As was my maternal grandfather, as was my paternal grandfather.

\*

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

There were other suspects besides the old man, all of whom in their own way were fucked up individuals. When you have a mentally ill family, the mentally ill come to play in your backyard and lead you down a mentally ill path into a mentally ill future.

\*

The front door of my childhood home was never locked; in fact, it was more like a revolving door for hotel guests to appear as he pleased.

\*

Genes + Revolving Door = Inevitable Psychosis.

\*

Don gifted me *Gigi* one Christmas. A truly disgusting movie.

\*

My brother and I have never spoken of my first nightmare, or my leftover childhood fear of him. Michael did have a temper.

\*

“Above all, what must we do to get behind the façade into the inside of the house...to the real secret thought behind it.”<sup>46</sup>

\*

Nearly all the nightmares take place in my childhood home, roaming the *uncanny* territory with suspicion and paranoia.

\*

I remember the home, but the home is also foreign to me.

\*

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 7

Hiding at the top of the tree, I'd hear them ask where I was and smile. I was safe, but only while I kept my eyes on them.

Reader, do you have any ideas as to why I have nightmares and how I can stop them? I've granted plenty of clues, so do give me some suggestions.

\*

War Veterans frequently experience nightmares. Luckily for them, years ago, a medication for high blood pressure was discovered to incidentally assist with the soldiers' post-traumatic dreams.

\*

The medicine did not work for me since I do not have PTSD about a specific event. Or so I thought.

\*

*Running into the bathroom while my father showers, shouting to him about a fire, to exit the home. He stays in the water, staring at me blankly, completely disregarding my suggestion.*

\*

After reading through the forums for Borderlines, I research therapists who specialize in personality disorders. I pick the first one on Psychology Today's search listing—an old man who fought in WWII. We were both living in Seattle and thought, why not see where this goes?

\*

During our first session, Lawrence asked me whether my hands were always so sweaty and proceeded to become overly ecstatic about my bad dreams. "Nightmares!" he enthusiastically replied, "I'm a Freudian—this is a dream come true!"

\*

*My friend leaves me alone in childhood home. Night approaches and I'm frightened. Two people appear wanting to fuck while I look to give them a spot. Go into my bedroom that now has mustard yellow lighting. Is it dawn? The room has transformed into a nursery for my niece. A rocker sits on top of something high up recalling Rosemary's Baby. My mother was 40 when she had me so her childhood things are old.*

\*

I should have known then and there where we'd end up. The analyst, Lawrence, and me.

\*

Recently I began wearing an eye mask at night but it never stays on.

\*

Sometimes I write about the benefits of insanity, but today I'm just tired.

\*

People don't think it's possible to stare at a dead body talking, but they've never met my mother.

\*

*Floating among trees, I anxiously search for how to safely land on the ground. David Chase's creations roam amuck as alas I plant in a bed of lavender, only for a mob man to begin holding me from behind. I, the stripper, held the mob man close, clutching his arms with the knowledge of my dead female ancestors. The zombie inheritors who've held onto men's arms for decades lest the lavender wrapped crucifix burn the witch at the stake. Dying people kill good things and find other bad people to cling to.*

\*

*I'm trapped in a crowded stairwell alongside herds of unknown bodies. The exit leads to a fire escape where hundreds of people also reside. A little girl has vomited and a grown man is climbing over her vomit. Somehow we become aware the building is going to burn down. We're all stuck*

*there to die, and yet I'm entirely calm. Look around at the faces with me and am at peace that these strangers are the ones with whom I shall be incinerated.*

\*

There was always a door separating me from the violence. A shut door barring visual perception or recognition. And yet, perhaps I recognized without seeing.

\*

Ever present in the home was a significant amount of noise.

\*

A recent study discovers that when we move our eyes, our ears twitch and follow along in unison. Thus, what we hear is in part based on what we see, or the sight of the sound makes the sound perceptible. In other words, the mouths we stare into decide the words we decipher amongst a chorus of speech in a crowded room. Our earlobes are bombarded with a cacophony of noises, and without vision, it is difficult to know how to censor, distinguish, or even erase one sensory input from the next.

\*

I heard but never saw, my eyes strained in vain attempted to understand, but never did, never could.

\*

Close your eyes in the center of a loud room: tell me what you hear. Of what do your ears pick-up on without seeing? Is this another portal to the unconscious, a key into the desire of the individual outside of the constraints of external reality?

\*

Who do you know who is alive but dead, and who do you know who is living and alive?

\*

The luxury of urban living lies in the proximity of bodies separated by material barriers that do not prohibit the traveling of sound. Anytime I hear screaming, slapping, underneath the floorboards of an upstairs neighbor, I freeze.

\*

I was never beaten though, please do not think me a victim. I have, however, always been a liar. At least I call myself one.

\*

To you, is it clear I struggle with perception? I cannot tell, myself, whether I'm telling the truth, or simply making it all up. The ideas come from somewhere, and yet there are no facts to back up the truths. All I have are the residual emotions from a hazy past. Those sounds behind doors I do not recall, though I do remember constantly being banded behind a threshold I both wanted and did not want to cross.

\*

Do not enjoy being center-stage, rather I feel comfortable being an injured understudy who fails to perform even when called upon.

\*

I dream an older man beats a young boy, but I'm behind the wood, pounding, trying to get inside unsuccessfully. I'll never have any idea what was going on, but one thing is certain, it didn't sound too good.

\*

Lying awake from the dream, I think of my brother recalling two incidents of being beaten by my father. One I was allegedly present for, as was the whole family. The other, was in private.

\*

As a very young child, I speak to my father about a time he hit me. He claims no such thing. Perhaps in the somewhere depths I do remember the beachside slap of my brother. Perhaps, being below the age of 5, being an infant with poor boundaries I did not understand that the beating of another did not mean the beating of oneself. Perhaps, in some sense I must have felt the slap, felt the pain of seeing a blood relative mistreated by the caretaker that was my father and misunderstood to whom my father was doing the beating. Does this make me a narcissist, an empath, or someone with poor boundaries and an active imagination?

\*

Going to therapy, I think about my father's callous, rough voice. Old age has made him soft, and yet I'm asked on the couch: did you fear him? Just like Winnicott, where is the father in all of this? For me, it's always been about the mother.

\*

I often envision, not sure if memory or not, of walking into the room I inhabited, seeing Mother sitting on her knees combing dolls' hair. I back away slowly so as not to disturb.

\*

When Mother brushed my hair, she did so violently.

\*

Didier Anzieu speaks of "skin ego", that rather than Lacan's mirror stage being the first introduction to the world, when the symbolic enters the framework of reality, touch is the actual portal door to the greater recognition of the imaginary, the external, and the objective. Through the process of breast feeding, the nipple to the lips the milky fluid down the throat, the baby actually introjects or internalizes a containing object into themselves to understand the notion of "a space

within the self<sup>47</sup> which then permits separation between self and object. The skin as being of a nature both open and closed to the world, being that it feels and is felt, learns to build a second musculoskeletal skin as protection from this duality.

\*

My skin is neither containing nor unified but spliced and penetrable – Mother and I, we share this. That’s where the rigid musculoskeletal skin comes in—the stylish masks. I get my beauty from her.

\*

Kathleen tells me my mother used my body in a perverse sexual way by acting out her unconscious fantasies onto my little girl body in a way that was grossly inappropriate, like a child bride or a pageant daughter. Violation comes in many forms. So maybe I wasn’t molested by my brother, but indirectly by my mother.

\*

*At some point in time a box full of umbrellas sent by my mother. They’re multicolored and quite pretty. In the car while my mother, completely vacant and lifeless, is driving, she attempts to drive us off the road. I’m screaming and take control of the wheel, slamming on the breaks with my little girl legs to bring us to safety. Immediately she gets out of the car and walks into the middle of the road right in front of an on-ramp of a highway. The oncoming car drives so slowly so it almost appears that rather than being lifted onto its hood, mother merely hops on, happy to carpool. From my point of view, she looks like a gray form in a body bag flopping around, however there are no injuries at this time. The car then picks up speed and goes onto the highway, bringing the body bag and womyn with it. I’m screaming and hysterical – and yet also relieved. Are they crocodile tears? I call my father as he asks how my mom is doing, and how he hadn’t “checked her*

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<sup>47</sup> Didier Anzieu and Naomi Segal, *The Skin-Ego* (London: Karnac Books, 2016).

*temperature” that day. I can’t utter the words of what has occurred, and he urges me to quiet and calm myself while an unidentifiable womyn stands next to me. We are on a stairwell and I ask her a forgotten question. She’s talking about the menu of a restaurant, something to do with the specials of the day, today’s being “blue moon”. It’s based on the story of a womyn who tried to commit suicide by jumping onto a car heading for the fast lane, only for her sister to chase after, find her, and accidentally run her over. I remember now I called my aunt when the car disappeared onto the on-ramp. The specials stairwell womyn thinks it’s a funny joke and so did the restaurant to make it a special. The cast of Sopranos is there, including the analyst, and she’s trying to get me to take these strips of paper, a drug that will sedate me. She says we’ll take it together. At some point, I’m also going up stairwells sobbing, maybe before I see the blue moon womyn. I think the umbrellas come after this.*

\*

I often dream about bodily fluids. Usually excrements. Me sitting in them, cleaning them up, an overflow of some sort. Or I’m unable to find a stall, or a clean stall, or a stall with privacy. People peek over the stall door as I sit in my shit, or try to shit, or wipe up the shit to no avail.

\*

Tired of everything in psychoanalysis being about the mother. If so, might want to consider bumping up my anticipated suicide from my 40s.

\*

Ogden while speaking on Bion discusses the difference between *memory* and *dream memory*.<sup>48</sup>

A recollection intentionally brought to mind can be the anxious mind consciously leading one to a distraction, a detour, a side door that hides the unconscious, potentially unbearable truth

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas H. Ogden, "Reading Bion," in *This Art of Psychoanalysis: Dreaming Undreamt Dreams and Interrupted Cries* (London: Routledge, 2005).

underneath. A dream memory on the other hand, is one that comes on the ship from the depths of the underworld, a guiding dark light that points to the scary waters underneath, the place that analyst and analysand wish to go together in order to encounter the territory of the real.

\*

*There the old man holds his finger over his mouth, while also holding your mouth closed as if to say, wait, let me speak before you do, and also, I'm going to speak in a low voice for the rocks will come falling should I yell. We can't let the foundation crumble just yet, not until I've passed you the message from where I've come. The others with whom I undertook this journey have all died, for nothing is solid in this maze from the underworld, so tread lightly with these slippers I bring and tip toe like a ballerina who pirouettes around her sleeping baby as if levitating. My vocal cords are limited and soon we will not speak the same language unless you stay in the unbearable present and let me inside you for a moment, though inside I've always been. I have something to say, and though you may not want to listen, there's something here for you to know.*

\*

Not good at riddles.

\*

I am an adult whose limbs have access to sound after twenty-eight years and I fantasize about how to give them instruments to play even a single note.

\*

Why then do I turn to self-mutilation? Like the consciously recounted memory, by actively punishing their whimpers, I don't have to hear what they have to say from passivity, relinquishment, submission.

\*

My punches speak first rather than listen second.

\*

I fear the other languages that lie in my elbows and kneecaps, the bony places where sharp things find a home.

\*

*Childhood Story #1: A grin from an eraser crawls up my leg. I look down and each time I blink it's moving further and further up my body. The lights go off suddenly, and when they are back on, the grin has disappeared. In order to make sure this thing dies, I suggest leaving the room, locking the door, and turning up the heat to such a level that the rubber man wherever he's hiding will melt. My classmates and I celebrate.*

\*

*Childhood Story # 2: I'm in a jungle with my brother and my parents have accidentally forgotten us. A tiger is approaching but in the nick of time they show up in a helicopter, realizing their error when they arrived home. We go out to eat and I only order a salad. I have no recollection of ever in my life eating salad as a child. My mother only ate salads. My family members ask me, just a salad? I tell them I'm not very hungry.*

\*

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but neither of us actually eat the apple, my mother and I.

\*

You know, Simone Weil's ascetic anorexia can be logical on certain days.

\*

I went to Catholic School my whole life, but the nuns were already gone by the time I got there.

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*My brother the kind one steers the sled ship on a frozen lake. It's beautiful. The ice begins to dissipate and I remember thinking about what would happen if I fell in the water. Usually at this*

*point I'm screaming in my dreams, but now I'm oddly calm. I envision falling inside and begin to wonder whether I would even put up a fight, or whether I wouldn't just let myself sink down into the dark waters. As I'm dreaming about this, moving about the frozen pond, still above water but visualizing sinking through it, a police boat goes by. The beast speaks: the police boat is here to scoop up a drowning girl.*

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A critical developmental milestone for Winnicott is the ability to utilize actual, objective, material objects in the world of play and fantasy. For Winnicott, the first object used by the infant is called “transitional object”<sup>49</sup>, as it becomes utilized to deal with the eventual understood separation between self and other, between infant and mother, allowing for the slow transition into realizing that oneself exists as an isolate. Winnicott explains that if this process occurs too quickly or too slowly, we have an issue.

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Living under a narcissist, I never had a transitional object for fear it would be taken away. The objects in my life could be destroyed, discarded, and thrown away, their aliveness was of no importance to me.

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For the renowned psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist, infants do not just select any object of their choosing, but one whose textures and sensual qualities appeal to the baby. We choose our object surroundings based on internal preferences, just as the infant sucks on the corner of the velvet blanket, rubs the plastic eyeball of the teddy bear, and chews the straw sippy cup, all to enjoy the sensual qualities of what that object has to offer.

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<sup>49</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1989).

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Although much of psychoanalysis deals with projections, I tend to learn towards thinkers who highlight the autonomous reality of things, the magical world in which objects speak to us as much as we speak to them. And for Winnicott, that is imperative that objects exist outside of us and are not merely projections of internal fantasies, because that is how infants learn how to actually *use* objects, rather than *relate* to them.

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To use an object, one must understand that it exists outside of our omnipotent control, but for many of us, we only use objects within the illusion that we control their reality. There is something magical about empowering the non-human and allowing the world of objects to blend together and reveal themselves to us through the strange power of allure.

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The philosopher Graham Harman writes not only of the importance of the non-human universe for human life, but also of the aliveness of the objects themselves. The inanimate world hides and reveals itself through an almost mystical capacity, highlighting not a phenomenological approach to objects in which they exist because of our conscious projections, but a magical one in which they have their own desires and intentions outside of human control. Harman writes how

...one billiard ball hides from another no less than the ball-in-itself hides from humans. When a hailstorm smashes vineyards or sends waves through a pond, these relations are just as worthy of philosophy as the unceasing dispute over the chasm or non-chasm between being and thoughts.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development II* (2007): 188.

For Harman, every relation itself is an object, and sometimes we become acutely aware when an object exceeds our capacity to grasp all it has to offer. Through this project, I am trying to comprehend the relations of my life by procuring secure objects out of written word, while refusing to acknowledge that perhaps the objects exceed my ability to do so: “When objects fail us, we experience a negation of their accessible contours and become aware that the object exceeds all that we grasp of it.”<sup>51</sup> My mother, father, analyst, assailant, bleed outside the page, making them inaccessible and out of reach, despite my fevered attempts.

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According to Winnicott, if one’s primary state of being is unintegration, one’s primary environment is that of fantasy, not reality. The infant, shifting in their pieces from here to there, lacks a firm understanding of reality, and lives in world of magic, and illusion: “It will be seen that fantasy is not something the individual creates to deal with external reality’s frustrations. This is only true of fantasizing. Fantasy is more primary than reality, and the enrichment of fantasy with the world’s riches depends on the experience of illusion.”<sup>52</sup>

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*Fantasy: The ephemeral place where sheets blur the reality. There is a stage that is real where objects lie (separately), and a curtain covers this. The curtain covers the stage and behind the stage are grins. Or are the grins encompassing in front of and behind the curtain? The grin is a stage worker whose body stands in between the red velvet and the audience. The grin says, come come, and also there are rocks here. I can’t tell you whether the rocks are smooth or not, you need to lift your feet off the Astroturf and follow my lips. If you follow my lips, there might be olive oil or vinegar, but I cannot tell you which. The fantasy has objects that are behind the red velvet, and*

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>52</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primitive Emotional Development," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 26 (1945): 153.

*here the objects lie together. They create a thing and this thing becomes fake, because fantasies are fake. Fantasies and real life are separated by red velvet curtains and grinning attendants. The attendant is probably a man, because men like to stand guard in front of curtains that invite you into fantasies. The real world is filled with womyn covered in olive oil. So, the rocks jump out in front of the curtain and the audience holds their breath as they walk into the fantasy and pretend there that pebbles will be smooth and that there will only be smiles. The air gets thinner, since there must be less oxygen to partake in fantasies. If there is too much breathing, then the air will fill with liveliness and past lives and the fantasy will crumble. The fantasy must not crumble, or the grin will throw vinegar on pebbles that then become rocks. No breathing in fantasies, and no eyes open. Yes, your eyes will be closed and together we will pretend that there is the potential for our hierarchical objects to merge together and they won't lose their shape. Shapes are formless in fantasy land because they merge, and figures usually do not merge because of borders. Borders are absent in fantasies, and so we smile because why not go to a place where there is no breathing, or open eyes, or real smiles. Only olive oil. No wait, I left the olive oil behind, and now I have to use vinegar because I'm bleeding in the fantasy and there's nothing else to cover the wound. Blood does exist in fantasies, because blood is a color, and transitory things need color to continue the illusion that the fantasy is real. The blood will bleed but the vinegar will help it stop, and the grin will stay hidden behind the pebble that's really a rock. Fantasies kill real objects, but they soak together in pebbly (or rocky) waters and pretend to merge. Fantasies are about objects that merge behind curtains attended by grins. Follow the smile, and the fantasy will make you happy. Or not.*

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For Winnicott, the experience of illusion signifies the meeting-point where the subjective intersects with the objective, that is to say, where the infant believes their subjective world crosses path with

the external world, as if the infant has omnipotent control over said reality. Take for example an infant in a state of hunger who, desiring the breast, believes their desire creates its subsequent appearance. For the infant, the breast appears at that moment not because the mother put forth her body for the infant's taking, but because the infant created the moment to be so. As one can imagine, this takes significant intuitive skill of the part of the mother to allow herself to be used by the infant in this way.

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Once again Winnicott grants his audience the notion of a seemingly pathological state of existing as being a *potentially* generative experience, rather than a detriment of being. However, just like before with the cautiousness surrounding living unintegrated, in the instance of fantasy, the caution is not of coming back together from living in bits, but in the importance of brakes – that of external, objective reality halting the potentially unstoppable fantasy from expanding into dangerous and delusional territories:

The point is that in fantasy things work by magic; there are no brakes on fantasy, and love and hate cause alarming effects. External reality has brakes on it, and can be studied and known, and, in fact, fantasy is only tolerable at full blast when objective reality is appreciated well. The subjective has tremendous values but is so alarming and magical that it cannot be enjoyed except as a parallel to the objective.<sup>53</sup>

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Just as I claim the danger is not in unintegration, but in a poor facilitating environment that fails to hold or enclose the unintegrated infant for periods of time, while also assisting them in coming

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

back together, the risks of fantasy result from a deficiency in material objects, in the inability to utilize reality in the fantasy, not in the process of fantasy itself. One can infer Winnicott again looks to the mother, or the facilitating environment, to somehow bring material realities into the infant's fantasy. Thus, her potential absence, and subsequent failure to present objects to the infant, as if through accident, or magic, means the infant's fantasy world lacks objective reality, and therefore becomes unhinged and nightmarish....

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*Fantasy: Fantasies are about objects. Objects that think they can come together. But things do not come together on the planes of the planet. Fantasies are not real life, but dreamlands filled with rocks. The rocks are smooth in the fantasy land, they are not sharp like gravel. The real world has gravel and Astroturf and also grins. Grins make up both the real world, and the fantasy world, but in fantasies they are hiding behind those smooth rocks. The rocks cannot be sharp, for if they are sharp, then the fantasy crumbles. Fantasies come from the head, or do they also come from the body? Can my finger have a fantasy? If fantasies are about objects, and my body parts are objects, then objects have fantasies of objects. Since my body parts are all separated and individual, they each have their own fantasies. Fantasies then can be hierarchical. Certain fantasies take precedence over other fantasies. Objects are not all equal, except in fantasies. In the real world, objects grin at each other, and throw rocks. Once the rock has been thrown, the fantasy ends and the grin spills vinegar outside of his mouth. The grin is a man, not a womyn, because a womyn would never use vinegar. She would use olive oil.*

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An infant left alone for too long in fantasy, in an unintegrated state, or both, without the eventual appearance of the mother or the holder of the infant, may believe, if already begun the process of object-relating, they have destroyed or killed the object (while one could argue this absent object,

might in some ways be somewhat non-human or dead already in their own right). This absence, or emptiness appears in Winnicott's piece, *Fear of Breakdown*:

...it is necessary to think not of trauma but of nothing happening when something might profitably have happened. It is easier for a patient to remember trauma than to remember nothing happening when it might have happened. At the time, the patient did not know what might have happened, and so could not experience anything except to note that something might have been.<sup>54</sup>

The infant left too long alone cannot understand the nothingness of its current life – for them there is no “absence” for that requires an understanding of “presence” (which presumes the capacity to understand an other / an object, an already begun process of object-relating). Unaware the mother should be present, the co-dependent infant begins to empty.

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However, there is a flip-side to idea of nothingness, of absence, in that for Winnicott, only through non-existence can existence begin.

There can be a positive element in all this, that is, an element that is not a defence. It can be said that only out of non-existence can existence start. It is surprising how early (even before birth, certainly during the birth process) awareness of a premature ego can be mobilized...[but] it can be noted here that this is a long distance in time prior to the establishment of anything that could usefully be called the self.<sup>55</sup>

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For Winnicott, the self emerges from this non-existence, just as it emerges from fantasy and unintegration. I would argue once again, that the danger is not that of non-existence, but of a

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<sup>54</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Fear of Breakdown," *Int. Rev. Psycho-Anal.* 1 (1974): 105.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

mirroring of non-existence in that of the mother or facilitating environment, not only through her emptying absence, but through the deadness in her face the baby sees when confronted with her image.

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And yet with Harold Searles, we find a parallel thinker to expand on this idea of non-existence in a similar realm, in regards both to the non-human and towards unintegration. Searles explores the undifferentiated state of human and nonhuman for infants as another pre-ego state of magical openings, liminal expanses, and boundary less existences:

...There is a primitive stage of development, in which the child has not yet become aware of the distinction between himself and his environment. That is, if the infant is for a time unable to distinguish himself from his human environment, and unable to distinguish animate from inanimate in the outer world, then he presumably is similarly unable, for at least some time postnatally, to distinguish himself from his surrounding nonhuman (inanimate, plant, animal) environment – unable to be aware of the fact that he is living rather than inanimate, and a human creature rather than plant or animal.<sup>56</sup>

If our primary state of being is one of fantasy, of unintegration, of nonexistence, then taking Searles, we can also add non-human to the list. The infant, unable to distinguish not only between self and other, cannot distinguish between his teddy bear and the pet dog in terms of animation. What we're dealing with is a state of magic in which all things are potentially imbued with a living nature, both animate and inanimate, human and non-human.

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<sup>56</sup> Harold F. Searles, *The Nonhuman Environment: In Normal Development and in Schizophrenia* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1960), 36.

Therefore, there is a richness in living alongside stuff, in living in bits, in fantasizing outside of reality, in channeling the nonexistent basis of our self, because as long as the infant, or the adult, is able to come back together, to leave the world of fantasy, to believe in one's existence, and to differentiate between human and non-human for periods of time, all the while being incubated in a facilitating environment of love and support, there's no reason one shouldn't throw the arm out the window, talk to the shower curtains, or daydream of a cyborg lover.

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One of my biggest regrets of the past decade is not writing down my nightmares. They are by far and large the greatest achievement of my life. Instead, I dissociated from the fear and repressed the memories, but now I'll never get those babies back.

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However, despite the forgetting, maybe having the nightmares at all gives me an upper hand, something that sets me apart from the rest. My unconscious, more alive than my dead consciousness, speaks to me in codes and since there are no brakes on my reality, the hallucinations continue unedited and unchallenged by objective fact. And yet as discovered through Winnicott, the brakes are key to a healthy ego. The brakes are what distinguish magic from insanity. An infant should have the capacity to create, to imagine, to desire, but she must not forget that she is a human in the world, and that the world has limitations which deny her creative musings. Reality is only so expansive before *it* snaps and *one* breaks.

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My narcissistic borderline mother could have been the key in allowing me to speak an unknown language, undetermined by materialist sciences, that's full of the potential to reach a liminal state between reality and magic. When you're both here and there, you're simultaneously existing and not-existing in both places. As long as I learn how to safely return to the world, to keep the brakes

in mind, there's no reason I cannot leave the planet for a little while and wander an alternative reality of my making.

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There's an advantage to pursuing a line of thought, to creating something (possibly monstrous, possibly angelic) that's not *yet* checked by reality. Sometimes it's a worthy experiment to crawl around in the dark until the last possible moment, when one's knees are bruised and bleeding before turning on the light.

## V.

“...when dancing one must be aware of the corpse one always drags along. A dancer, then, lives and works with this particular understanding of subjectivity: her body is not only hers, her body is a composite of living and dead body parts, assembled under the provisional exercise of activating embodied transmitted intention or choreographic thought. Indeed, there is no other subjectivity for the dancer than to be a host – and to experience his or her body as already a condensation and an amalgamation of endless series of other bodies. This is why a dancer knows her legs are not quite only her legs; a dancer’s intentions are not quite only his; just as his bodies, even if flailing like crazy, are not quite fully only alive because they continuously must remain open to receive and express what Avery Gordon called ‘ghostly matters.’”<sup>57</sup>

*The dead dancers form a circle, exchanging limbs, trading horror stories of the underworld, the afterlife, and the beyond all the while teaching each other how to pirouette and waltz in their fresh host body. The knee of one he begins to bleed as the finger of another she holds the wound closed with pressure and gauze, not merely in empathy, but also in fear that they may one day gain this knee and have to learn to salsa. An eye rolls out the socket and onto the floor, collecting putrefied bodily remains that have fallen like incendiary ash, hoping to join the dance party with its squinting muscles, looking around the room confused at seeing only one body skirting the hardwood floor. But that eye knows that within this one body lays the body of the many. The he with the pressing finger, the she with the gaping wound, and the eyeball that searches for its original owner, believing it too one day, can be on the body of a dancer.*

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<sup>57</sup> André Lepecki, "Teleplastic Abduction: Subjectivity in the Age of ART, or Delirium for Psychoanalysis: Commentary on Simons "Spoken Through Desire", " *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 14, no. 4 (2013): 303, doi:10.1080/15240657.2013.848323.

I'm in the process of mourning a death I thought was mine. The funeral had been planned for Tuesday and the lipstick had been applied. My dress was pressed clean, hair tidied, dirt excavated, the fingernails showed no letters being buried underneath. The body was inspected and ready for public viewing. The eulogy prepared, the flowers cut, the pamphlets folded – and so, I waited to walk up to the dead body and smile; here we meet again, alas. Extending lively dead limbs, or dead lively limbs, we meet in order to stare at the mirror and see the reflection in each other's spinach teeth and hair strands. Walking down the aisle to see my open coffin, I wonder what it will be like to see myself in this vein for the first time. Not my whole self, just the part that's been generating my deadness since the orchestrated still-birth of mine back in the 80s. The possibility for the same trauma to be ingested over and over. The repeated and continued identification with deadness across decades...centuries? So I thought I would stare her, it, in the face: confront my dead self through my aliveness in order to regurgitate the blood cupped in the back of the throat. For the biopsy was wrong: she died, I died, we died, from drowning. From allowing a pool of blood to fester without a swallowed action. Except she's not really dead, she just needs to be drained. Cut open. Sucked dry. I have enough liveliness to perform the task, lucky for her, me, it. Toxins are only dangerous when they're still, inert, cupped in a mouth with spinach teeth and floating hair strands.

And yet you can imagine my surprise at seeing not me, but me-her. Her-me. Not split off, divided, neatly sectioned and categorized like an anatomical chalk drawing, but entwined together, entirely enveloped, combined, as if the same fingers built them simultaneously yet separate yet together. Even the eyeballs boasted a pupil color neither here nor there. My deadness, that which I built a funeral around to mourn like a mourner and not a melancholic, is muddled with a primary narcissistic identification with your dead object, or the transgenerational dead object of the abused womyn in this lineage. That object of yours is also mine, and it's also hers and theirs and ours. It's

about time somebody had a funeral, so we can move on with our dead lives. I'm strong enough to confront my inner morbidity, to slurp out festering toxins and shuffled blood so that the dead body can actually die, and so those that come after can be more than hair strands that writhe in a pool of their mother's inherited death. A death that floats in their mouth like a squirming rat whose tail is stuck in the esophagus. Who would have thought the mirror of the funeral was really a portal through which womyn breathed her last dying breath and went on to actually die for good. We're going to need a lot more coffins, these visitors are dropping like flies. I'm tired of siding with the dead, but sometimes feeling alive requires a whole lot of murder.

## Epilogue

Has the madness ended or only begun? Epigenetics, trauma studies, womyn's studies, has taught us the inheritability of trauma, of insanity, of deadness, however that does not deny subjective culpability. With me, I end the past of madness that refutes growth – through me a new beginning begins. Through Winnicott I have learned the power of utilizing my weaknesses: proclivity towards unintegration, non-humanness, and fantasy, as strengths, while still acknowledging the potential for their psychopathology and developmental hindrance that often goes unnoticed during moments of madness disguised as genius. My analyst has given me the power to speak, to breathe, to live again, and for the first time I feel rooted in a real reality where others exist aside from the mad womyn of my past. I have returned to a life I only had a vague awareness of its existence, thus I shed my deadness behind me like an unneeded layer of skin and embark on the unknown of what is to come. Naked, I roam the streets searching for a start, plagued with guilt over the lost ones in my lineage but still hopeful for a new beginning where I learn how to live freely and in a body I call my own.

... one day whatever I do will be blindly surely, unconsciously, standing in myself, in my truth, so entirely cast in what I do what I will be incapable of speaking, above all a day will come on which all movements will be creation, birth, I will break all of the noes that exist in me, I will prove to myself that there is nothing to fear, that everything I am will always be where there is a woman with my beginnings, I will build inside me what I am one day, with one gesture of mine my waves will rise up powerful, pure water drowning doubt, awareness, I will be strong like the soul of an animal and when I speak my words will be unthought and slow, not lightly felt, not full of yearning for a humanity, not the past corrupting the future! what I say will resound fatal and whole! there will be no space in me for me to know that time, man, dimensions, exist, there will be no space in me to even

realize that I will be creating instant by instant, not instant by instant: always welded, because then I will live, only then I will live bigger than in my childhood, I will be as brutal and misshapen as a rock, I will be light and vague as something felt and not understood, I will surpass myself in waves, ah, Lord, and may everything come and fall upon me, even the incomprehension of myself at certain white moments because all I have to do is comply with myself and then nothing will block my path until death-without-fear, from any struggle or rest I will rise up as strong and beautiful as a young horse. <sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Clarice Lispector, Alison Entrekin, and Benjamin Moser, *Near to the Wild Heart* (London: Penguin Classics, 2014), 193-194.

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