EMBRACING AMBIGUITY: MOVING TOWARD MADNESS AND DEATH IN

PERFORMANCE

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Table of Contents

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Embracing Ambiguity: Moving Toward Madness and Death in Performance

Abstract:

This MRP comprises two inter-related papers examining the intimacies of death and dying and their relationship to madness through performance.

The first paper focuses on the use of alternate reality games (ARGs) as a medium of performance. In particular, through the exploration of my own ARG, I discuss the possibilities ARGs have for madness and death. I suggest that this format, unlike other mediums, has distinct features that would benefit mad and disabled artists in their explorations of madness and disability. Through the articulation of the intimacies of death and dying and the abject, this paper also seeks to explore the further significance of their conceptual applications in discussions pertaining to mad subjectivity.

The second paper seeks to examine the complex relationships between death, madness and performance through the invocation of the Intimacies of Death and Dying and the theatrical use of the Abject. This paper asks: What is it about the act of being alive, that qualifies us for being embodied subjects? Further, what does it mean for those of us whose embodiments are conditional? Through navigating these relationships, this paper tentatively examines what exploring these relationships might mean for mad subjectivities and dead embodiments in the context of performance.

Embracing Ambiguity: Moving Toward Madness and Death in Performance

Part One—Culling Myself: Madness, Death and ARGs

Have you ever had the feeling that you saw something that you should not have in a public space (online or in real life)? Have you ever seen something so strange, so out of time and place, that you had no way of explaining or rationalizing what it was? If you have, you might have been witness to an immersive piece of transmedia, also commonly known as an alternate reality game (which I to refer to as ARGs from here on out). ARGs in their current form, can be described as interactive online games that use multimedia to carry the narrative of the games. These games emphasize participation from the audience in order to tell the story and the game can range in length from weeks to months to years and across multiple formats. The term "alternate reality game" was coined in 2002 by early-ARG developer Sean Stacey, who worked on some of the earliest ARGs including Lockjaw and another [unnamed] ARG that was used as publicity for Steven Spielberg's film *A.I.* (2001) (O'Flynn and Seelow, 2017). Part of my interest in ARGs comes from a place that recognizes these games should not just be considered games, but rather often complex performances that not only cover a variety of themes like any performance art might but also implicitly asks gameplayers and audience members alike to question the ways in which we frame what is real, what is visible and what is disappearing. Another of my many fascinations with ARGs is the possibility this medium has a method of performance to challenge and situate narratives around madness and disability. In my previous paper, I introduced the concept of the intimacies of death and dying and their relationship to madness and the abject. I describe the intimacies of death and dying to be the intimacies that are produced by death and more particularly, "[t]hese intimacies are primarily informed by the finite space between the individual's embodiment during the state of dying and their subsequent

transition to becoming a dead person." (Sabada, p. 3). These intimacies are reliant upon the kind of death that occurs and to the conceptualization of the self. In other words, these intimacies form from the interactions between the kind of death and the various embodiments and subjectivities contained within the self. In relation to ARGs, I have spent the past year crafting my own that incorporates the intimacies of death and dying in order to centralize one of the major subjectivities in my work: madness. The goal of this ARG is to use death not as that which *disappears* the mad subject, but instead *reveals* them.

The History and Significance of ARGs

To unpack the potential that ARGs have for performances that focus on madness, death and disability, it is first important to provide context for the medium and its history as this history greatly informs the ways these performances are witnessed and interacted with.

As I mentioned the first time this community of game-makers, players and witnesses became identifiable as a group was with the adoption of the term, alternate reality game. Since Sean Stacey and earlier ARG predecessors' time, the community has imploded, at least in terms of the amount of games that we have been able to identify. Just in contrast to today, the state of the ARG as a medium is still relatively unrecognized as a form of gameplay by the general public despite the increase in active (and confirmed) ARGs since the early 2000s. Reportedly "between 2001 and 2006 there were 'seventeen commercial alternate reality games (ARGs), fifty-two independent ARGs, and many dozens more smaller and lesser-known ARGs.'" (Dena, p. 42). Although I cannot give a definitive number of active ARGs in 2020, I can say that there has been a substantial interest in the medium, with sites like argn.com and the reddit thread for ARGs (suspected and active) as well as a plethora of online content creators like Nick Nocturne of Night Mind, Nexpo, ReignBot and ScareTheatre, all of whom are dedicated to archiving, tracking and theorizing over various ARGs. Still, the funny thing about this medium is that just

like any kind of art, you never quite know how many people are doing this work, *however,* this un/knowing is *central* to ARG culture because ARGs—at least during their infancy—were designed to be innately integrated, enmeshed with the fabric of our reality:

> In a well-designed and produced ARG, the interactions and in-game events mimic real life and don't announce themselves as elements of a game at all. There is no simulation of a virtual world through a symbolic interface. By integrating technology and devices that players already have and use on a regular basis, it becomes much easier for the player to suppress or ignore the knowledge that he is really just playing a game. (Szulborski, 2005)

To an extent, this definition works in the sense that it encapsulates most unknown ARGs and; some elements of this definition, such as mimicking real life, may also describe well-known or commercial ARGs. However, it should be noted that given the medium's reliance on maintaining the ability to transform across mediums and more importantly to alter reality, it would be impractical and careless to over-emphasize the importance of discretion and faultless immersion into our reality within these games. Many ARGs thrive because of the possibilities generated by their reveal as not happening within our reality. Historically, the reason we can identify ARGs is because at some point, the games forced us to be aware of the unrealities the players were dabbling in. For example, some of the earliest ARGs were commercial games[1]. Used as viral marketing campaigns for video games, television shows and films, these games lured players and later audience members in with the intention for the games to culminate around the metaphorical curtain to drop. The revelation of that which had disappeared during the performance (reality) became the site of the performance.

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[1] Examples of these include a five-year long ARG called Junko Junsui developed by the writer of popular video games *Battlefield Hardline* and *The Vanishing of Ethan Carter*, Rob Auten; an ARG for popular the horror film that started the "found-footage" genre, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999); and ABC's action thriller television show, *Alias* (2001).

Embracing Ambiguity: Moving Toward Madness and Death in Performance

Peggy Phelan argues in Unmarked: The Politics of Performance (1993), that performance "becomes itself through disappearance." (p. 146). In other words, this form of "disappearing", that is, the making of the performance itself, happens when subjectification becomes invisible. In a sense, Phelan highlights the importance of performance living in the present. "Performance," she says, "cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance." The intention here is to *make* through the *loss* of an archival form. In the case of ARGs, the performance does not necessarily have to become performance through disappearance, but rather, it lends itself to the spectacle of what is real and not real. To have an archival form at all is all that may be required to enact performance. The body in which the performance locates itself matters less than it does for the performance to dislocate itself from our reality. ARGs stretch our suspension of disbelief as far as it can possibly go, with the understanding that once we become aware that we are not participating in the reality natural to us, we will continue to keep vigil, to become witnesses anyway.

Keeping Vigil: The Real, The Alternate and the Abject

ARGs thrive on occupying and operating in states of ambiguity. It is through this ambiguity that creators suspend time, that creators invoke that of the otherworldly, the monstrous, the abject. Ambiguity invites us to reform, build on, and create new contexts for our work, and perhaps more importantly, gives us the ability to excuse what is "real" and instead, forge new realities of our own. These new realities—really an expansion of the concept of a hyperreality or what we could constitute as an alternate reality—are only possible through the abstraction of the "real" we are situated in (Baudrillard, p. 2). We cannot completely abandon what we do and do not know of our own lives because we dictate what we will eventually perceive within these hyperrealities. It is impossible to make a Lovecraftian monster of our

reality, so unrecognizable to humanity that we could never be capable of generating entirely separate realities completely unlike our own. Instead, turning to abstraction and embracing abjection allows us to simultaneously disappear the reality we know and instead embrace one that could not be closer to who we truly are. In his book on the conceptualization of the simulacra (a means of viewing reality through the recognition of the simulation of life), Baudrillard says that:

> To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending: 'whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces himself in some symptoms' (Littré). Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'" (p. 3).

In essence, the ARG makes it possible to both dissimulate *and* simulate. It abstracts all sense of reality by pushing forth a conceptualization of life conscious of its falsehood but is both capable of making and unmaking the material, cultural and social realities. ARGs are guided by their own principles and while the creators cannot create their own contexts as traces of their lives will always be refracted in some shape or form in their process of creation, they are still capable of making the world that their audience knows, malleable. They disappear parts of reality in order to reveal others.

In relation to abjection, alternate reality becomes possible when we embrace ambiguity. As I argue in the second part of this work, the point of my injection of the abject here is to

identify how embodiment (now within the context of ARGs) is made conditional (Sabada p. 40). The abject, for as much as it disappears, reveals the seedier ways in which particular subjectivities are managed through discourses of power. When combined with alternate reality gaming, the abject allows creators to fully explore the ambiguous, teetering between the binaries of sick/healthy, young/old, real/unreal, human/animal, living/dead, good/evil etc. Part of what makes ARGs so intriguing as a performance medium is their innate abilities to disrupt previously held notions within academia. Over the course of this year as I ran my own ARG, I struggled immensely with the ethics of performing madness as I felt, even though I am a mad person— therefore at least entitled to my own narrative—I was decidedly not entitled to abstracting madness, or at least, that was what I had been led to believe. In Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), she begins by saying:

> My point is that illness is not a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking. Yet it is hardly possible to take up one's residence in the kingdom of the ill unprejudiced by the lurid metaphors with which it has been landscaped. It is toward an elucidation of those metaphors, and a liberation from them, that I dedicate this inquiry." (p. 3-4).

To an extent, I understand Sontag's contempt for the way metaphor more often than not mythologizes and [de-]moralizes sick bodies. I too, have seen my fair share of horrific metaphors that devalue my existence, my own illnesses often oscillate from serving as the butt of jokes or the justification for my own extermination. Still, at the same time, just as language that concerns the body has the power to harm, so too can it remedy. When executed properly, metaphors are not prejudicial; they can be informative, clarifying and illuminating. ARGs often metaphorize

conditions of the body to make larger claims about the society that their work intends to alternate reality back onto our reality. For example, *This House Has People In It* (Resnick and O'Brien 2016), a higher budget ARG that was featured on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim, during the hours they run "infomercials" examines the documentation of a family's descent into madness through the use of a fake illness and pertains to issues of the emerging surveillance state, articulating madness as deviance and criminality, and capitalism and the medical industrial complex. The basic plot follows a family whose home has been rigged with security cameras by a company named AB Surveillance Solutions and tracks the family as each member is infected with a fake disease called "Lynks Disease," which makes the carriers go insane and it can only be contracted through the handling of clay in prison yards. The grandmother is seen on the original video returning home in handcuffs, presumably from an attempt to get her hands on the clay. The granddaughter Maddison is also confirmed to be the first carrier of the disease after her mom chews her out for smoking because cigarettes contain clay. However, regardless of who initially infects the family, it is revealed that Lynks is transmitted through the air, infecting everyone in the house regardless. Unlike other ARGs which rely on the villainization of madness, this ARG embraces the campy absurdity of insanity through humor. The ARG's intentions with the invocation of madness through physical illness is not to bastardize the experiences of being ill. The intention is to encourage speculation among viewers while critiquing the state for its ineptitude at handling sickness and criminality.

As another creator who invoked illness to speak to larger issues of what it means to live and die both under and directly by capitalism, I too turned toward the abject. As much as my ARG in its infancy relied on disappearing and integrating within this reality, it truly took off once I made the madness I created, visible. Without the combined forces of integration and

absurdity, I could not have achieved pushing my audience to feel disconcerted by what they were witnessing. Further, without the abject and the use of visual metaphor, I would not have been able to deploy the intimacies of death and dying, something I will explore in depth next.

The Origins of Bartleby's Syndrome

Before going further, it is important to understand what I have done with my ARG and why this medium became significant in terms of what I wished to achieve through performance. In my ARG, there are multiple worlds. Players and witnesses will not know this until I release my final videos during August 2020. These worlds are sick with an infection that no person is immune to. This infection is known as Bartleby's Syndrome and a fictionalized version of myself only becomes aware of its existence through a person we never see, named Pelagia Clarke. Pelagia is obsessed with fictional SK and under the advice of another character we do not see, but know of, Dr. Kane Pinel, Pelagia serves as a herald to SK and their friends on Facebook, warning them all of their infections. For the first part of the game, Pelagia does not name what this infection is to SK or their friends who were involved in the game. Instead, Pelagia only reveals the nature of this infection when prompted by a friend of SK's, unaware that this was part of an ARG (appendix c, figure 12). Pelagia, ever so cryptic, only reveals to the player the symptomology of the syndrome and says that the infection "spread[s] through the direct and indirect transfer of bacteria, viruses and other germs. They can pass through interactions and through touch (affectively, socially, politically, physically, structurally). A cough, a sneeze, a kiss, touching, speaking, screaming, shouting, crying, spitting, paying, living and dying are all common methods of infection."

Pelagia does not give the infection a name at this point in the game, but Bartleby's Syndrome is a reference to Herman Melville's short story, *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853), which tells the tale of a coded-neurodivergent (and arguably queer) scrivener who slowly dies as he fails to

come to grips with living in an increasingly industrialized world. This story is told from the perspective of his boss, a sane lawyer who makes note of how his four employees' different neurodivergent tendencies effect his office. When I first read *Bartleby the Scrivener*, I fell in love with Bartleby (despite all of the story's problematic elements) because the story does not attempt to depict neurodivergence as a site of failure as caused by said neurodivergence, but rather, the narrative focuses on how neurodivergent peoples' failings are inherently politicized sites of resistance to corporatization and sanism. Abjectly refusing to complete tasks as Bartleby does in the narrative should not be interpreted as the inability to succeed on account of being a neurodivergent person, but rather his failure should exemplify how incompatible people are with capitalist labour. Bartleby is expected as the coded neurodivergent person to appeal to his boss' demands of reading work aloud, even though this is an accessibility concern for him. In fact, the boss is repeatedly featured as being capable of reading aloud on his own and further, that he only asks that documents are read aloud because it is his preferred way of catching errors in written texts. The demands placed on mad people –and even sane people—within institutionalized spaces are often irrational. Our bodies are only rendered problematic or ineffective when we cannot appeal to arbitrary rules. Instead of working to assist Bartleby, or even to help the boss' other staff members, the boss does nothing to make work accessible. The unruliness of Bartleby and his coworkers is not a tale of sick body-minds moving through an institution. It is the recognition that institutions, in industrialized, capitalist societies are ironically enough, a kind of sickness themselves. The result of people not being able to survive and thrive in them is merely a symptom of capitalism. Although the story certainly has its flaws, the invocation serves to further the idea that the world we live in both exacerbates pre-existing illnesses but also produces sickness on its own.

Part of the reason the definition of Bartleby's Syndrome is so broad is because I needed the people paying attention to the game that this kind of syndrome was one that could be caught seemingly through any interaction and based on this, this should lead players to wonder why there is no noticeable consequence for such transmission, unless one is paying attention. In the game, the only people who become more noticeably ill (indicated by strange behaviors) are SK and Pelagia, with Pelagia encouraging SK to embrace their sickness. I demonstrated this through the hyper-fixation on the color yellow[2] and through both the loss of normal written communication and later, the adoption of alternative methods including communication through imagery, ciphers and out-of-context passages from Sarah Kane's play, *4.48 Psychosis*.

Yellow and Ciphers: Performing Madness and Death

When I grew up, my mother had always been clear about what the color yellow meant to her. Yellow is the color of her favorite flowers (sunflowers) and it reminds her of sunlight. For her and many others, yellow is a color that invites joy and happiness. This always struck me as strange when I was a kid because of the negative associations I connected to the color. I had been taught by others, through unconscious association, that yellow is not a good color. Yellow is the color of dandelions, a weed. Yellow is the color grass turns when it dries. Yellow is the color of urine. Yellow is the color scabs turn from cuts. Yellow is a color of pus. At some point, I began to harbour contempt for yellow. If it was the color of the sun, the bright dying star that made my eyes ache, and it was the color of the flimsy legal pads that could never bear the weight of my paint, and most heinously, the color of the drawing marker who so easily dirtied from interactions with other markers that it had the audacity to ruin my drawings, then how could I possibly rationalize it as being a good color? Obviously, over time my hatred for the color

changed into one of a morbid fascination. The color that I had associated negative affects with, became another source of intrigue in the long list of oddities I am enamoured with. For a while, I ruminated on my child self's contempt for the color. Why yellow? Why not colors that also easily could have bad connotations, like red (blood, anger) or black (rot, death)? As it turns out, part of my contempt quite possibly took root because of centuries of ableist encoding; because yellow has a long history of being associated with sickness. This association dates as far back as to medicine's use of the four humours of the body, as a diagnostic method (really, nothing more than a theory) that supposedly revealed the underlying disposition of an individual through an assessment of the four substances of the body (phlegm, blood, yellow bile and black bile), yellow bile being an indicator of the choleric temperament (Hickey, 2015). Because of its association with choleric temperament, yellow took on symbolic affective associations with violence, revenge, deceit and jealousy (21). Additionally, the color also became associated with illness as it was considered to be a color the body produced through waste; urine, sweat, pus and vomit. Yellow, then, became an indicator of health: "[n]ot only waste byproducts, but the skin, the sclera, the tongue and mucosa can change colour during illness, with yellow implicating itself in many of these observable changes." (4) Outside of the site of the body, yellow was still used to indicate sickness: yellow international maritime flags were and still are used both to signal to quarantine on land and sea, dating as far back as the 1400s, specifically during outbreaks of yellow fever, cholera and leprosy (Mackowiak and Sehdev, p.1071; Chase-Levenson, p. 15, Hickey, 19). Even wearing yellow could signal to mourning (22).

In my ARG, yellow is an important visual cue because it points indiscriminately to the worsening infection. Choosing yellow over other colors on earth 1 (our earth) is a sign of the infection's spread. On earth 3, where Bartleby's Syndrome is much more obvious in making

people physically ill, garish yellow spots (somewhat akin to bruises) appear. My intention with this is not to "prove" madness exists by mapping it on the body. The significance lies in yellow's inescapability. This is in part, a reference as well to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Gilman's work troubles consciousness through the invocation of the color yellow. Her narrative focuses on a woman subjected to a "rest cure," after being diagnosed by her husband who is a doctor. Over the course of the story, after being pursued by what our heroine believes to be a woman moving in the yellow wallpaper of her bedroom, it becomes increasingly obvious that she is not the only one experiencing such affliction. As our narrator gives into the madness and pursues the woman in the wallpaper, her maid and husband try to resist acknowledging that they too are becoming ill. Similarly, Bartleby's Syndrome, much like the yellow wallpaper, is inevitable. Regardless of whether the residents of earth 1 choose to wear or buy yellow things, they cannot escape coming into contact with it. From the sun to clothes, to furniture to bugs, to grass to fruit to urine, we will all come in contact with the color. We cannot outrun nor deny its existence within our world. Fictional SK wears yellow quite often. They changed their profile images over time to appear more yellow (appendix b). They even make an image with the font yellow, to communicate to Pelagia because after being alerted to the color's association with the syndrome (appendix X, figure 3), they know there is power in embracing this symptom. The yellow image, while visible and possible to read, is extremely straining on the eyes. It is difficult because the color is so light, it blends into the white background.

Your body is not a word,
it does not lie or
speak truth either.

It is only
here or not here.

this form you will not steal.
It is fractal but it is mine. I will return to my form insane beyond all measures but it is mine alone.

you came bringing a pestilence distinct from the syndrome and i will not allow you to ravage any part of me further.

you did not ask; you took and the form will remember what we did.

Big text: Your body is not a word. It does not lie or speak truths either. It is only here or not here.

Small text (by SK): this form you will not steal. It is fractal but it is mine. I will return to my form insane beyond all measures but it is mine alone. You came bringing a pestilence distinct from the syndrome and I will not allow you to ravage any part of me further. You did not ask; you took and the form will remember what we did.

Yellow is inevitable. It is a symptom for a sickness from which there is no cure. Through yellow, death follows. Yellow, for SK, means an internal rot. For Pelagia, it is a physical rot. Once Pelagia makes a home in SK's body, this rot spills through. SK too begins to both wear and bear yellow clothing and yellow spots. As Pelagia combines with SK, sharing in their physical body to avoid their own tragic fate on earth 3, Pelagia changes their Facebook header from an image that reads "The Self is fractal. Ravaged and Transformed for who? And to what ends?" (appendix a, figure 1) to one that reads in sickly yellow-green font "a saner life tomorrow." (Kane, p. 232) To embrace the space SK offers, to succumb to the yellow rot necrotizing them from outside in, Pelagia abandons sanity. A saner life tomorrow is not a promise, it is not a prediction so much as it is a suspension. There is no tomorrow for a dead body. There is only a tomorrow for the self, one that is only possible to achieve through embracing SK.

In terms of communication, crafting and performing madness is a very sensitive task. Part of what troubles me most by performances that feature madness and death is the over-dramatization, theatricality and exaggeration of suffering on the part of mad and dead characters.

In some ways, I think this takes away from the power of invoking the abject and further disrupts the intimacies of death and dying. The purposes of the abject and the intimacies of death and dying are to make madness and death clear through ambiguity, to trouble and disrupt the binaries between sanity and insanity; life and death. To over-emphasize or assume a lack of mind (capacity) in characterization, turns madness into monstrosity. It invites the audience to criticize mad subjects not on the basis of their actions but criticize through a lens that innately dehumanizes. The risk of making madness monstrous has deadly consequences for mad subjects. As Therí Alyce Pickens notes in *Black Madness:: Mad Blackness* (2019), the basis for what we consider "human" is fundamentally informed based on ideologies developed out of the period of western Enlightenment. To be a human is to be guaranteed one "will be thought of as an autonomous subject, operating with agency and securing the legal, social, cultural, political and material conditions to do so." (p. 74) To be a human, then, is a privilege many of us are not afforded. As Pickens points out, for black scholars, humanity has always been a highly contested concept, considering black people are rarely, if ever, assumed to be people (p.75). Similar to Pickens, I am wary about this conceptualization of being, and am aware given that my perspective is informed by my whiteness, queerness and madness, that the relationship between race and personhood cannot be ignored. As much as I can attest to the ways in which the subjectivities I can speak to, may also experience dehumanization, the relationship between racialization and personhood is a specific one, and the violence against bodies of color is immeasurable compared to that of white mad bodies. I do not think it is particularly helpful to hold onto the conceptualization of personhood—this desire to be validated through being human, because I know how salient this condition and others like it (most pressingly, sanity) are. Make no mistake; the point here is *not* to emphasize a need for humanizing the mad subject. It is not

sufficient enough a strategy to acknowledge all the ways mad subjectivity has been weaponized against the bodies who experience it. Humanizing madness cannot lead to staging the ephemeral experiences of madness, nor can it even begin to liberate us from the oppression of sanism, mad and non-mad alike. Mad subjectivity is both a beautiful and ugly thing. It throttles and blurs lines of permissible aesthetics, affects, gestures and behaviors. To confuse the embrace of this blurring, this ambiguity, this abjection with monstrosity, would be ultimately detrimental to the depictions of madness. The answer in the face of a creative culture that demands a clearly defined opposition to sanity which is innately linked to the human, is not to make mad people monsters.

In terms of performance, making madness is a careful process. In my ARG, it was important to me that fictional SK and Pelagia communicated in ways that expression felt right. Communication generally, should never occur as a spectacle. Alternate forms of communication should be taken seriously. This is a strength of the ARG medium because alternate forms of communication, unlike in the real [and heavily, unbearably ableist] world, are always legitimate. There is no further examination upon the methods creators choose to tell their stories unless the form of communication somehow emphasizes what is being said or who is speaking. In *Daisy Brown*[3], an ARG that lasted from July 2017 to August 2018 and whom I hold great affection for, is one of the first ARGs where I saw an alternate form of communication used that caught me as

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[3] These are the official YouTube and Twitter accounts (respectively) of the Daisy Brown ARG. This ARG is completed. This ARG was run as a vlogging channel to document the experiences of Daisy Brown, a young queer girl who, under mysterious circumstances, has been abandoned by her father and left to raise his science project named Allen, a blind monster. This ARG is meant to be understood as happening within our (real) world, even though it is clear that Allen is a paper-Mache prop. There are no supernatural elements beyond the existence of Allen and in part, while Allen serves as the foil to compel Daisy to ultimately run away and move on from her traumatic past in the home of her abusive father, the audience is supposed to view Allen as a legitimate character despite being cast as a monster because of his symbolic appearance. Allen instead, must be interpreted not only as a member of Daisy's family, but also as a complicated character who is motivated by the traumas of grief and loss that circle the Brown family.

a mad creator. Unlike other well-known ARGs such as *POST Content* (2018) and *This House Has People in It* (2016), Daisy Brown's narrative did not require audiences to solve puzzles or hack into random sites to still have the gameplay aspect. Instead, viewers became involved in the game by actively piecing together the narrative of Daisy's strange life by turning on the closed captions of the videos to reveal that they did not contain transcriptions of conversations captured within the video, but actually contained diary entries from different times and characters not featured within the current-timeline of the ARG. Although there are certain aspects to this formatting that I found challenging as someone who is concerned about accessibility, what is important to take away from this kind of communication is that it allowed the audience to understand the traumas the titular character, Daisy Brown, was experiencing in the series. These diary-captions did not serve to exploit Daisy's experiences as someone who I believe could be read as mad, but rather allowed her to reveal important parts of the narrative that further contextualized the overarching themes of surviving abuse. Further, the use of the captions allowed for a greater fleshing out of the relationships between the characters. As much as these captions served as diary-entries, they too, also functioned as reflections that directly and indirectly conveyed to the audience the affects and gestures of the other characters, in particular, another mad-coded character, Allen.

In my own ARG, the use of ciphers became very important as SK's infection "worsens." As a verbal mad person in a society that centers and prioritizes audism (this being the form of oppression aimed at deaf people and generally, others who use alternate non-verbal forms of communication), I have been quite fortunate in retaining my capacity to use verbal communication. However, as a mad person who also struggles with social cues, I often struggle to understand and process the behaviors and tone of my non-mad peers. This means I often do

better communicating through written word. In my ARG, to represent the spreading of the infection, I had fictional SK communicate in ciphers. This form of communication could signify to a "worsening" condition but I recognize the possible site of ambiguity ciphers present: to speak in ciphers in a world that largely does not understand one, only to be communicated to by those who can or do wish to attempt to, is by no mistake an allusion to the very real experiences I and other mad and disabled people have daily. SK's embracing of ciphers is a gesture that contains the intimacies of death and dying. As we know, Bartleby's Syndrome, regardless of severity, is a terminal condition. It is the syndrome we all die from and die under. SK could have suppressed their ciphers by not speaking, but they continue to do so anyway. This act, even though at times, a revolt against Pelagia's encroaching desire to take possession of part of SK, is still a movement toward death. SK embraces ciphering even though it is this very condition that limits their capacity to be understood by others, because it is part of who they are and are becoming.

Suffering, Interdependence and "The Code to the Core of Things"

In the final arc of my ARG, which is forthcoming, I intend to perform fictional SK's death and subsequently, their resurrection through Pelagia. One of my intentions going into this project was to craft a narrative where embracing one's madness, despite its oscillation toward death, would lead to a liberation of the self from the body. As a mad person, the body often feels like a site of detention. The body is the point of fixation in which I experience surveillance. The body is the thing that others fixate on when they try to wrangle my madness for me. The body, as much as I love it, is the point in which identities, archetypes and pathologies are projected onto, further binding me to experiences I would rather prefer not to be attached to. The body is an anchor my mind did not ask for but has begrudgingly occupied for the past 23 years. To make an ARG where the body became the site of a home for one and the liberation for another is

immensely important to me because this captures the point of the intimacies of death and dying and their relationship with madness: madness is both life and death producing. To recognize madness as both life and death producing is a means to acknowledge the relationships the mad subject (in this case, both SK and Pelagia) have formed to living and dying; being and becoming. Part of what makes it difficult to conceptualize death as generative is its innate link to notions of suffering and further, the ways these conditions are produced to be negative. Suffering has long been a fixed feature of performance. It is hard to find any work that does not include suffering as an integral part of the plot. At the same time, we are conditioned to associate suffering with negative affects when we should not necessarily view suffering through this lens. My intent here is not to diminish the experiences of harm that suffering causes. I do not deny suffering its definition as being that being a state of experiencing harm; instead, like other affects, I wish to acknowledge the importance suffering plays within the conditions of living and dying (not a death of the individual that has fully set in, but perhaps may be included to those who grieve them). I want to consider the temporal existence of suffering for a moment, and its role within our lives, but I find I am increasingly limited by its elusiveness so instead, I turn to a remnant:

> We need the weight of the world we fear…we're all about mindfulness and hardened against those who fail. Whether we're jumpy, or trained in the controlled pause, it's a world under pressure that inspires us. We rage up from unsteady to overwhelmed…
>
> (Berlant and Stewart, p.22)

Like the weight Berlant and Stewart write about, suffering is this weight. It is the decision to choose mindfulness and to harden against failures. Suffering is the compulsion to be still and unstill, our pressure, our rage and uncertainty. Its destruction—this great and terrible thing that makes anguish well up inside of us and twists our sensibilities, is not a site that we can or should

bind to negativity. Not all suffering is equal, nor is suffering fair, but to borrow the words of poet Sara Eliza Johnson, our suffering functions "like molecules magnified, a code to the core of things." (p.6) Suffering can so easily enmesh itself within the fabric of our other affects. It is present in both love and hatred; joy and sorrow. The use of suffering in my ARG is not to add to the long list of narratives in which mad people toil and lament without purpose. The harms I cause my characters are intentional and so much of contributing to mad performance is to spend time in the things that trouble us. The narrative makes more sense to me as one that situates madness and death [and suffering] at its core to find its roots in making suffering a necessary component. The trauma of living mad in a world where one is ostracized for their behaviors and appearances is worth spending time on. The madness cannot be free until all contexts the body it is attached to, are addressed. We cannot get better by simply making madness disappear. The goal is to encourage collectivity, to support each other. We cannot help each other without acknowledging that our contexts and our behaviors inform ourselves, others and the world at large. My ARG cannot guarantee long-term survival for those with the syndrome, but what it can do, is emphasize the need to hold onto each other, to be accountable, to practice care. SK and Pelagia must move toward each other, embrace their mutual destruction (the syndrome) together in order to become who they were meant to be separately. Pelagia left the world they knew behind because they did not want to die. SK, who grows sicker, relies on Pelagia to communicate now that they find this increasingly a site of inaccessibility. In other words, Pelagia's survival depends on SK, and SK's capacity to function relies on Pelagia. They necessitate their own needs for interdependence in order to become the people they are supposed to be.

Part Two—The Intimacies of Death and Dying

How often do you think about death? When you think about death, what kind of questions do you ask? Do your questions find their focus on the physical happenings of the body once the embodied person has essentially vacated? Or perhaps you find yourself asking questions related to the embodied person specifically. How will you be remembered and by who and in what ways? Does your legacy carry enough brevity to continue years after you have departed? Personally, I think quite a lot about death. I think about both my own and others'. Friends, family, acquaintances and strangers. I think about the states of dead bodies, ranging from the various states of decomposition to the forms in which they rest[4] to the spaces they occupy[5]. I think about the time the dead spend around alive and how somewhere in the occupation of the latter end of the spectrum, the dead go from being seen and referred to as people, to being bodies. It is this phenomenon—one that effectively disembodies the embodied, is what I find myself most concerned with. What is it about the act of being alive, that qualifies us for being embodied subjects? Further, what does it mean for those of us whose embodiments are conditional? Just as some bodies are loved, other bodies are brutalized. Just as some bodies are endowed with personhood, other bodies are not. These categories (loved/unloved, safe/unsafe, person/non-person) serve as affective and political spaces that we oscillate between throughout our lives. It is this oscillation that intrigues me as a mad artist. Mad subjectivity can rarely be parsed from death. The construction of sanity—that which we have come to accept as "good"

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[4] Have they been cremated, buried, compressed into a rock for the purpose of a loved one to be able to wear them in the form of jewellery? Perhaps the remains have been combined with seeds and now experience a divorced life in the form of a tree.

[5] From urns to coffins. Perhaps in the homes of loved ones or in graveyards or more unfortunately, in spaces they cannot or will never be reached.

and "normal" or things we otherwise code as acceptable—is only possible through the parallel

construction of *in*sanity. Insanity has not been as fortunate because it is heavily coded to be

"bad", to be "non-normative", to serve as a placeholder for people who are arguably more

consciously inclined to die and from a sanist rehabilitative view, willing to die without an

acceptable reason.

In my own performance work as the puppet master for the alternate reality game, *Bartleby's*

Syndrome (2019), I have played heavily with madness and death. This performance, carried out

on social media, documents the fictional version of myself struggling to survive as a mad person

against the backdrop of a [fake and fatal] infectious disease that everyone on this earth (and other

earths) have. Death, in *Bartleby's Syndrome*, is inescapable and inevitable, but it also does not

occur in the conventional ways we think about death. In the narrative death functions as a

double-edged sword: it is both necessitated by the state's rejection of sick bodies, but the death

of one person can also mean liberation from the state and from the world, for another. In this

way, when we think about death, it is important to be specific because there are multiple kinds of

death and ways to die. Each death means something different. For example, ego death, the little

death[6], clinical death[7], "good" death[8] and "bad" death[9]. Each kind of death has its own set of

rules that govern over who participates, who triggers the death, the manner in which the death

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[6] The little death, or what is also known as la petite mort, is an expression coined by poet Thomas Hardy that has been used to describe the borders of the human body, particularly around the site of pleasure, but has also been used to describe a loss of consciousness and of propriety (Jakimovska, 2016; The Australian Ballet, 2014). To experience the little death could be described as losing a part of the self to sensation and inhibition.

[7] Currently, brain death is what constitutes clinical death. Historically, however, the death of the heart has also been used to diagnose death.

[8] A good death is a death that occurs in compliance with one's definition of what a good death is. Common criteria for a good death may be painless and swift, surrounded by loved ones who are well-prepared to deal with the loss.

[9] A bad death is a death that occurs in a way one does not wish to die. It may be characterized as bad because of the manner in which life is lost (i.e., dying a preventable death, a brutal death, a death at the hands of the state, a painful death or even a slow death).

plays out and how the dead/dying person and those around them respond to that death. It is the context in which these deaths occur that is the most significant to this research project. In particular, my research finds its grounding in questions of embodiment and what I refer to as the "intimacies of death and dying." Unlike conventional ideas about intimacy, which inherently focus on the interactions between alive individuals, the intimacies of death and dying focus on intimacy produced by death. Death, much like sex and madness, is one of the most intimate experiences a person will ever have. Although the act of dying may occur in proximity to others, therefore establishing a kind of rapport between the dying person and their living counterparts, being dead is a highly specific and highly personal embodiment to experience. In Lauren Berlant's essay "Intimacies," she writes that "intimacy…involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way," shaped throughout the context of the relationships these intimacies are borne from; she argues that intimacy is inherently entangled with "the view of 'a life,'" that these relationships are established from intimacy (platonic, romantic etc.) with the hope that they will last for a long duration, sometimes beyond entire generations (p. 281). Although the intimacies of death and dying are certainly informed by relational intimacies between dying and non-dying subjects, these intimacies are primarily informed by the finite space between the individual's embodiment during the state of dying and their subsequent transition to becoming a dead person.

These intimacies, just like any other, are inherently ==performative== and are informed by the notion that we are oriented to move toward death, however, I take a departure from Heideggerian[10] and Freudian approaches that would otherwise suggest that death is imminent

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[10] Given the nature of my work as a scholar of disability studies, it would be highly inappropriate to entertain Heidegger's work without acknowledging that his work cannot be removed from his support for eugenics. My research emphatically prioritizes the bodies which he would have argued for a termination of. Therefore, while I find

(MacAvoy, p.63). This kind of performativity is a particular one: as much as the performative signals to a series of expected speech acts and gestures related to the affects surrounding death, the performativity of these intimacies are innately shaped by the rejection of death as an ending and simultaneously, the rejection of endings being their own kinds of death. Instead opposition to this and Heideggerian and Freudian approaches to the subject, I propose that while death is always on the horizon of possibility, many subjects are already rendered dead because of their particular embodiment/s. This alters the conceptualization of moving toward death because it recognizes the subject as that which oscillates between the kinds of death. The totality of [clinical] death being fixed and imminent imposes a restriction upon this work that would not allow me to account for the multifarious experiences of death and dying. Instead, I borrow from Patrick Anderson's approach to the morbid through the invocation of "the politics of morbidity," which refers to "the embodied, interventional embrace of mortality and disappearance not as destructive, but as radically productive stages of subject formations in which subjectivity and objecthood, presence and absence, life and death intertwine." (p. 3) This approach allows us to position death not as a fixed embodiment but a proliferous and generative state of being that is inherently shaped by the subjects who invoke its presence. Invoking madness through death then, allows for an exploration of mad subjectivity that we are rarely afforded to see because of sanism.

 For performances that centralize madness and death, the intimacies of death and dying and the politics of morbidity are useful tools because they allow us to embrace the intimate relationship between these subjectivities without the risk of reaffirming sanist notions about mad people being death driven. Perhaps more importantly, they are also helpful in acknowledging

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some of his approaches to the subject of death useful, he is and always will be inherently limited by his incapacity to view life and death outside of their worth or value.

that suicidality is not innate to mad people, nor should we fear for or of those who wish to die. Embracing the relationship between madness and death rejects the compulsory positive affects that capitalist and sanist cultures try to enforce.

Making Mad and Being Mad

Before discussing performance that invokes both madness and death, it is important to first turn to the constructions of madness to get a clearer understanding of what it means to perform madness and how it functions as a subjectivity in relation to death. Although all embodiments are assembled through a complex series of material conditions, repetition and to an extent, performance, madness is an extremely slippery embodiment to pin down. Although madness is *also* made through the grouping of repetitive behaviors, recurring affects and gestures, these demarcations constantly shift according to whatever flight of fancy psychiatry lends itself to in a particular moment in time. Historically, this was not always the case given that the conditions akin to madness that predated the advent of the asylum were often social identities imposed on the subject by those around them[11]. Although the history of madness could arguably extend as far back as the history of humankind, the period I am most concerned with in terms of how it contributed to and effected the current constructions of madness, happen with the advent of the confinement of mad people.

This is partially because the confinement of mad people cannot "be seen as a consequence of a professionalizing psychiatric elite, but rather as a strategic response of households to the stresses of industrialization." (Wright, p. 137). The beginning of institutional

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[11] What we consider a form of madness or mental illness in the present may be found in those who would have been accused of or described as witches, fools, demonically possessed, psychomachy, and paupers (Porter, p. 15, 17, 26; Wright, 1997).

confinement for mad people within the west points to a strengthened response from the state to assert control over undesirable populations, compounded by a developing capitalist culture. In *Madness and Civilization*, Andrew Scull writes about the period in Western history known as the Great Confinement, which details the rise of asylums during the mid-seventeenth century. Scull's genealogy focuses primarily on France and England after the well-known doctor and colleague of "revolutionary-era physician" Phillipe Pinel, Jean-Étienne Dominque Esquirol began to report on the state of the insane to the Bourbon monarchy (p. 190). In discussion of the expansion of asylums, Scull notes that although the opposition to the building of asylums during this period was motivated by the financial desire not to invest in care for mad people, the asylum system inevitably became profitable for those who operated these institutions, particularly those facilitating private asylums (p. 193). Given that the "therapies" being practiced during the Great Confinement period and beyond focused primarily on moral treatment, the system was arguably designed to benefit capitalism through the exploitation of mad labour in addition to the seizing of patient assets when applicable. As Scull writes, "some remnants of reason remained in almost anyone, and could be made use of through skillful manipulation of their environment to encourage them to suppress their wayward propensities." (p. 202). The general basis for such therapy stemmed from the notion that work encouraged a discipline that could curb one's mad tendencies. Considering that this kind of therapy innately benefited asylums, the kinds of mad bodies they ultimately retained were those that could be used for labour. For example, it was noted that "at Quebec's Beauport asylum in 1849, the family of patient Jean Dupont charged that this man was 'kept in the asylum in a state of slavery because he was a good worker whose labour was of great value to the institution'" (Reaume, p. 164). This patient's story is not a

singular one: patient labour was profitable enough to encourage those running asylums to retain

such labour as they also did not have to compensate their work.

      This is significant because although this period of medicine was certainly concerned with

the existence of mad people, medicine also could not deny there was both social and economic

capital that could be sussed out by *making* madness. Consider popular mental maladies of the

time. Diagnoses that attributed mental maladies to the womb for example, like hysteria or

nymphomania, became prominent diagnoses for female patients or even the pathologization of

queer sexuality (Berrios, p. 225; Kunzel, p. 315-16). This kind of targeting also extended to

people of color. In particular, entire psychiatric diagnoses were made to justify the need for

slavery within the United States: "African Americans who protested slavery and ran away from it

were labelled as having a mental illness, or more specifically, labelled as having "drapetomania"

(Waldron, 2002; Washington, 2006)." (Kanani, p. 6) To have a diagnosis that could apply to a

large and visibly identifiable group would have been beneficial to the state in terms of eliciting

control over these groups. The power of psychiatry as an institution is not just in its ability to

incarcerate and exploit bodies made mad, but that it has been treated with enough reverence that

such power often goes unchecked. Madness has always functioned as a salient apparatus for the

state to assert control over unfavorable groups because madness is *made*[12]. Madness is made

through operating as the non-normative. Unlike physical disability, which is also formed from

being constructed in opposition to the normative, madness does not rely solely on physicality to

"prove" affliction. Mad people simply have to carry out specific behaviors, affects and gestures

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[12] I wish to acknowledge that it is not my intention to discredit the very real, lived experiences of madness, rather, I am skeptical of the institutionalization of madness as I cannot ignore the fact that so much of what we "know" about madness can only be informed by naming its facets in opposition to sanity.

in order to be constructed as the other, opposite to sanity. Diagnosing madness within the body—being able to locate the source of madness—may simply be used to reify claims of insanity.

As Lennard J. Davis points out in his chapter, "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century", "the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person." (p. 3). Sanism works in conjunction with other forms of oppression, so this means that it is not just enough to avoid the affects, behaviors and gestures of mad people, if you hold an unfavorable embodiment, if you have an unruly subjectivity, all it takes to render a diagnosis and quite possibly experience institutional violence, is to have one off-kilter performance of insanity. Sanity, much like insanity, is entirely conditional. We judge and police each other's sanity every day and we maintain the illusion of being sane by reiterative processes.

To avoid direct harm, one must perform sanity. Both sane and insane, mad and non-mad people maintain the illusion of sanity through the uses of mimicry, passing and masking. Passing in this context, refers to ability for people (both sane and insane) to maintain the aesthetic of being sane by consciously subverting sanism through deception, achieved by veiling one's resistance (Mills, p. 210). Masking, unlike passing, is reserved strictly for mad and neurodivergent people. Masking does not occur as a compromise between "'political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt'"; masking is not a privilege in the way passing is. Mad people mask in order to be safe amongst sane and neurotypical people. Masking does not necessarily equate to maintaining or fulfilling the aesthetics of sanity, but rather may occur to shield some behaviors in order to maintain safety. Masking is not always a choice. Alternately, mimicry is a technique that most adequately describes the ability for sane people to maintain

their status as sane individuals: "constructed around ambivalence, [colonial] mimicry must, in order to be effective, continually produce its slippage, produce difference." (p. 212) Sanity is not a neutral embodiment because at its core, it exists through producing a difference it aims to control. It becomes a weapon when it is named, even when it is questioned. To interrogate sanity is to align oneself with insanity, regardless of whether that is one's intention because our culture binarizes health. Of course, this does not mean that being sane in the conventional use of the term is necessarily violent. In some ways, while sanity as a collective subjectivity may be violent in the sense that it serves to reify otherness as insanity, as something that needs to be cured, rehabilitated or contained, having a sane subjectivity is not. Like anything, sanity is weaponizable.

One of the major issues involved with having a mad embodiment in a culture where sanity is easily and readily weaponized, is that being mad cannot be parsed from its entanglement with sanity. There is no "pure" articulation of what it means to be mad or insane because insanity is constructed and those constructions are liable to change. Although one experiences madness wholly and unconditionally and may express that they cannot live a moment without their own madness, madness is still coded. The experiences of it is an ever-evolving collection of affects, behaviors and gestures. Madness in this way, is a conditional embodiment that forms through repetition (conscious or unconsciously) and reaffirms its existence within the self through these processes. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to articulate what mad embodiment looks like in performance beyond emphasizing and exaggerating the behaviors, affects, gestures and aesthetics that currently inform what madness is.

In some ways, because of this, madness within performance often lends itself to taking on mythical qualities, borrowing quite often from the archetypes of the grotesque or the monstrous.

This is not to say that such archetypes are necessarily "bad" when they are used in tandem with madness, *but* it is very easy to mask sanist ideologies within their deployment. So often, sanity is associated with telling the truth, to account for reality and maintain a false sense of neutrality which dictates what conditions of life are or are not acceptable. Opposite, insanity is always associated with deceit (whether such deceit is intentional or not); insanity cannot regulate or comprehend reality, it is never neutral, and it is considered a state which produces its own problems. The mad subject is always responsible for their madness. Although one can be driven insane, it is ultimately the burden of the mad person to keep themself operating within the truthful, neutral and "real" realm of sanity. Obviously, mad people are capable of things sane people are, however in performance, madness is exaggerated.

One of my major concerns with the use of madness in performance is what could only be described as an obsession of sustaining sanism in perpetuity through making madness a caricature of itself. The over-reliance on exaggerated aesthetics and behaviors goes beyond the confines of campiness and borders into something much more disturbing. This most often appears in the aesthetic depictions of madness. Obviously, aesthetics serve purposes within the realm of performance: aesthetics can reveal truths about the self, pertaining to their own social and political contexts. The danger of aestheticizing a salient identity like madness, is that such an aestheticization can be informed by eugenics. As mentioned, regardless of the salient element of madness, madness has historically been diagnosed by finding fault within the body. Although medicine is not as overtly concerned with locating madness within a physical body part (obviously aside from the brain), psychiatry and the arts alike have still homed in on the physical aesthetics of madness through visible dishevelment:

> Wild, unkempt hair; tattered clothing; red-veined, staring eyes; muttered imprecations; fists shaken at "things" that are not there; outspoken dialogues to the different parts of oneself. These are stereotypical conceptions that make it clear how madness is seen: as visible differences of appearance and behavior that demarcate a symbolic boundary between "us" and "them." (Cross, p. 199)

Madness is made recognizable through conditions of the body that deliberately signal insidiousness. These descriptors are covert projections of the sane imagination yearning to pin the monstrous on the mad. There is no room to question whether these bodily conditions could be easily explained by other factors like socioeconomic status, racial stereotyping, or even physical disability. Alternately, there is no room to question how hygiene plays a role in the realm of respectability politics. How often do artists and doctors alike attribute specific features and behaviors that might be easily attributed to another marginalized group, to their coding of mad bodies? In what ways are these depictions of mad people causing harm to mad and non-mad people who happen to be unfortunate enough to be describable by words like "disheveled," or "unkempt" or "wild"? This aesthetic does more than stereotype; at its roots, it takes on eugenic qualities. Paired with the truth that the archetype of the mad person is almost always a negative representation, the aestheticization of madness sets a dangerous precedent for both mad and non-mad people as madness is often used to both justify the perpetration of violence (often if the mad individual in question is white) and excuse the abuse experienced by the mad person at the hands of those around them. If we are not villains sheerly based on our madness alone, then our madness (often coinciding with experiences of trauma) becomes the foil to plot points for sane characters. Mad characters suffer not because they must, but simply because they can and do.

My concern over the aestheticization of madness does not exist out of a desire to sanitize

what it is to be mad. Of course, there is variation in the way mad people exist and behave—to

disavow the notion that some of us very well may be described by or even identify ourselves

within this language would be absurd. My concerns, instead, lie with how performance can be

used to reinforce the policing of mad people based on our overall appearance and how our

appearances are often used to pass moral judgements. The problem is the binarism of what is

unsavory. So often mad people straddle the lines between the human and the monstrous. In

performance, specifically theatre, mad people rarely have the privilege to be people. We are the

manifestation or the result of evil. A contemporary example that I believe demonstrates the ways

in which a mad individual is made out to be a monster is Alex Oates' play, *All in a Row* (2019).

The play follows the story of a young autistic boy name Laurence who bites a girl in a park.

After the incident, a stranger (who we later discover was actually Laurence's mother) calls social

services, and reports Laurence being bruised when he is not. This launches an investigation into

the family that results in the decision to institutionalize Laurence in a residential school.

Laurence's father finds out it was the mother who called, leading to what appears to be a

marriage breakdown that triggers an emotional breakdown in Laurence. Laurence bites his

mother and after this, the family settles down to watch *Finding Nemo*. Narratively, this story is

underwhelming and exhausting. A nonverbal autistic child being portrayed as violent meanwhile

his caregivers experience relationship conflict driven by said child and who hardly do the work

of unpacking their non-autistic desires to pack up their child and send him away presumably

forever is hardly original or clever. What is perhaps most disturbing is the decision *not* to portray

Laurence by a child actor, but instead use a grey-skinned felt puppet with lifeless black eyes and

orange and brown spikey hair and whose bottom half is made up of his puppeteer's legs,

rendering him a very large child-ish creature with man legs[13]. In short, Laurence looks like a monster out of a Lovecraftian horror who does not speak and bites people.

There is so much wrong with this play that I doubt I would be able to adequately address all of its issues within the length of this paper. Instead, I will focus sheerly on the aestheticization of Laurence and the implications of such mad representation. Unlike other performances wherein the mad figure is made a monster through actually turning them into a non-humanoid looking subject, *All in a Row* achieves making Laurence a monster through puppetry. This is significant in mad depictions –particularly depictions of autism—because the puppet invokes the myth of the changeling child. Historically, predating the medicalization and recognition of disabled children through labels, a popular method of rationalizing such existence was to take issue with the supernatural. Initially, the term used to describe a child born with visible disability "was monster, a word derived from the Latin *monstrum*, something marvellous, originally a divine portent or warning" (Eberly, p. 59). Despite the focus on physical disability here, it should be noted that these kind of invocations of the supernatural would also extend to mad and intellectually disabled children, with specific mythologies developing around specific disabilities.

In terms of the changeling, although this supernatural identification is now most recognizable with its attachments to autism, this term was applied very loosely so as to fit

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[13] It should be noted that the decision not to use a autistic child actor was due to the fact that the creators felt it was "'untenable' to get autistic performers to play the part" as they did not believe they could acquire informed consent from a non-verbal autistic actor in addition to having to adhere to labour laws around employing children (Dex, 2019). This of course, is incredibly incendiary. Please note the irony in the showrunners being it to be too difficult to inform non-verbal autistic children of a play that supposedly reveals the nature of what life is like with autistic people…As if it is a feat to explain autistic childhood and compulsory ableism experienced by autistic children to…*well*…autistic children.

individual cases (p. 58). The changeling myth details the kidnapping and replacement of a normal child with that of a fae creature, a hybrid between a human and an inhuman creature, or my favorite; plain old demonic possession. This myth is closely associated with autism because of the noticeable and diagnostic shift in an autistic child's behavior that occurs when they are around two to three years of age. The sudden shift in normal behavior[14] to abnormal[15] behavior makes the child almost unrecognizable to their caregivers, hence this change being explained by the historical response of child-swapping. The changeling, in other words, allowed families to blame the existence of the child on both the child and supernatural forces. The child engenders monstrosity through being the product of their caregivers' lament over their non-normativity. Especially in the case of autistic children, who outwardly may not be visibly identified for their madness/disability, the changeling myth is a convenient excuse to allow parents to grieve over the perceived loss of the dream of the normal child. The myth allows caregivers to acknowledge the autistic child an agent of disruption over normativity.

All in a Row utilizes this myth by physically dehumanizing and dispossessing Laurence from being played by an actual, human autistic child. Instead, he is a humanoid puppet, a changeling in the sense that we know what he is supposed to represent but is still capable of engendering monstrosity. Using a puppet forces the audience to see Laurence's marked difference. Laurence will never be like his very human parents because for all intents and purposes, he is not a person. He is little more than a cheap imitation of the child we are supposed

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[14] Normative behavior in this paper is characterized by the child reaching developmental milestones on time. This also extends to the child learning and adopting conventional non-autistic communicative behaviors like regulating tone and volume (appropriate for that of a child), speaking and maintaining eye contact.

[15] These behaviors are characterized by the perceived inabilities for the autistic child to meet the hallmarks of conventional development. Autistic children may be recognized by their lack of eye contact, struggles with or abject refusal to communicate verbally, experiencing meltdowns instead of tantrums, and trouble with regulating emotion in a way that is deemed acceptable by non-autistics.

to wish he would be. Laurence is nothing more than an object of violence: he bites another child and later his own mother. He is described as "autistic, non-verbal and occasionally violent", he is what the playwright perceives to be his most damning qualities (Dex, 2019). We are never allowed to see Laurence's world from Laurence's view. We are meant to view Laurence the way the human characters do. In an interview with the playhouse the show premiered at, puppet designer and director Siân Kidd provided the rationale for using a puppet as opposed to an actual human actor:

> Laurence is non-verbal and the power that puppets have is that they explore movement and can just with just the turn of the head or some degree of small movement give life and character in a way you wouldn't achieve with a human actor. And so, it's given us a platform to explore the characterization of Laurence in a way that doesn't feel insensitive. (2019)

This is incredible because one of the directors recognizes that Laurence is not meant to act in the ways that a human actor would, despite being puppeteered by a very real, grown non-autistic man. Using a puppet with this rationale cannot possibly be perceived as offensive or reinforcing ableist ideology because Laurence is not meant to symbolize a real [code for non-autistic] child. Laurence is quite literally not a child nor a person. Instead, he is an exaggeration. He is the violent, aggressive autistic changeling who moves in ways a non-autistic could never imagine but may somehow be tasked regardless with blocking his movements. The show's other director, Dominic Shaw goes on to reaffirm the decision to use a puppet in the same interview:

> It made perfect sense to me because Laurence does some shocking things physically. He bites people, he has very challenging behavior. We can do that with a puppet because its slightly from it being real and I think that's a gift to this production.

In other words, only a non-human entity is capable of portraying an autistic realistically because autistics are not people. Laurence is the other, the other who bites people and whose movements do not fit within the conventional acceptable behaviors of non-autistics. There is no way to imagine an autistic with "challenging behaviors" as human because, as we are all supposed to know, no non-autistic has ever been capable of enacting violence ever. The funny thing is that non-autistics do it all the time. Non-autistics are consistently enacting violence upon autistic people. The whole plot of this play depends on a non-autistic's desire to contain, incarcerate and segregate the only autistic character in the show, away from every [non-autistic] person. Is this not an act of violence? Removing a child from the only world he knows, from everyone he loves, because he bit two people, one of whom was bit because they were violently screaming at Laurence's father, while Laurence was having a meltdown? Were there not multiple things that could have been done to help Laurence change "challenging behaviors"? Of course, I acknowledge caretaking can be a taxing experience without adequate support to care for the mad/disabled person in question, but forgive me, as I do wonder just how difficult it must be for someone to have to move through a world that is not accessible to them, to move through a world that is innately combative and hostile of one's existence. To, say, function in a world that can only tolerate one's existence through developing a monstrous mythology to rationalize their purpose. Embracing this kind of narrative and perpetuating claims that center the experiences of caregivers over the autistic person reinforces sanism. Embracing one autistic person's singular acts of violence without interrogating why one might behave that way codes violent behavior as

the monstrous. For Laurence's behaviors to be the source of the violence instead of also interrogating the ways his caregivers interact with each other and their respective environments decontextualizes and invalidates the reasons for Laurence's perceived aggression. This hyperfixation on the "challenging behaviors" of mad and disabled people renders us both bad and non-human subjects.

I mean, call me autistic[16], but perhaps reaffirming sanism and ableism should never be the goal of performances that explicitly deal with mad and disabled themes. This of course, is not to suggest that there is no place for the invocation of the monster in performances about madness and disability. Quite frankly, many of the characters I looked up to as a mad and disabled child were of the monstrous variety. When used properly, engaging with the monstrous and concepts related to it (like the abject) can be extremely helpful in the production of mad-situated performance. The issue is invoking the monstrous without contextualization, without recognition for the optics of the larger subjectivity at play.

Embodiment and the Abject

The intimacies of death and dying, then, are highly concerned with the conceptualization of "being." For the purpose of this research, I turn to Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject to further unsettle the notion of embodiment (1982). Abjection is "in its broadest definition…a state of being cast-off and degraded, one that puts the subject in an ambiguous position with regard to distinct categories: citizen and stranger, human and animal, the living and the dead." (p. 6, Bruin). The purpose of abjection is to ascertain the ways embodiment remains conditional. Just as the body serves as a site of analysis, that which foregrounds knowledge within the material,

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[16] I literally am autistic. You are quite literally allowed to refer to me as such.

embodiment is a theoretical attempt to capture how the things the body does or does not do, makes a bodied person. Embodiment, in other words, evades being static and in turn allows us to acknowledge the ways in which our bodies lack material, political and social permanence (Arya, p. 5). Instead, the physical conditions that make us beings are a complex combination of physical, political and social gestures. Our embodiments become a means of eliciting control over populations because as varied as our subjectivities are, we often cluster and organize around shared physical states and gestures.

In relation to the politics of morbidity, understanding our own impermanence is crucial because it allows us to better acknowledge the ways our embodiments are made conditional by external forces. In the context of performance, embracing the abject and deploying the politics of morbidity allows artists to forgo conventional treatment of the corporeal; what alteration is done to a body, allows the subject to map the ways corporeal reality subjugates. The abject makes it possible to exploit our vulnerabilities in order to reveal the truth about the ways our embodiments are made conditional.

In relation to death and performance, the use of such politics helps marginalized creators by giving them space to change the permissibility their respective mediums expect of their art-making practices. For example, in the theatre of Negrogothic cinema, the intention of the process of artmaking is to change the way the Black body appears in art:

Disappearing the performers body (rioting, decaying, temporally jailed) brings his being into being. Transcendent black being rebecoming pure light and energy. Negrogothic cinema is looking for a way out of both body and time. The theatre that constitutes it and that calls forth suspends time, both because it aims to connect with the infinite, and because it rejects the pornographic representation of black flesh. (Lamar and Culbertson, p. 31).

In this kind of performance art, the Negrogothic body summons the history of trauma experienced by Black people and is further compounded by Black communities' resistance and resilience in the wake of a world that is built upon white supremacy, imperialism, colonialism, and slavery. In this space, Black artists are able to simultaneously call upon their histories of harm and of radical survival without appealing to the [white and anti-Black] foundations on which modern theatre rests. Blackness is not meant to be consumed by or for the white gaze; a gaze which I identify here as that which seeks to make a spectacle of or eroticize Blackness. The Negrogothic belongs to itself. It is not made for consumption in the same way the work of white performers who dabble in the abject do. Artists like Isaac Julien and M. Lamar create in order to disappear. Their essences are ephemeral, the way they articulate themselves in and navigate space cuts the [thin] veil of politeness that mask structures of racist and colonial violence against bodies of color, prioritizing Black experiences.

Individually, Julien and Lamar utilize summon the abject in their respective disseminations of the physical body. In Julien's short film, *The Attendant* (1993), Julien explores the sexual fantasy of an older Black gay museum attendant and his encounters with a young white man at the gallery. In the display, the attendant looks at a colonial painting entitled "The Slave Trade" (1840) by Auguste Francois Biard. As he looks on, the figures of the slaves and the slave master in the painting and the young white man who is visiting the gallery shift and transform until they are all dressed in fetish gear. Julien contrasts the violence of colonial artwork with the sexual pleasure of sadomasochistic queer communities and in a broader context outside of the film, this work was produced during the AIDS crisis. This recapitulation of colonial art allows for Julien to queer Black history, effectively uprooting the white supremacy of the art world and setting it parallel to a wider dialogue about the intricacies of violence and

pleasure. The prerogative of this work is to center Black queer men while putting into context where they find often paradoxical sites of pleasure. Julien's sadomasochistic imagery acts as an "access point to traumatic pasts" that allow the film to exist in a space that can contextualize its loci in a white supremacist, settler, capitalist state amidst a public health crisis but is suspended in a space that simultaneously allows for Black subjectivity to become disembodied but also to perpetually name the grief that haunts it (Westengard, p. 55; Lamar and Culbertson, p. 32). As much as an argument can be made about the aspect of reclamation in Julien's film, we cannot ignore the temporal context of the piece being made in the midst of the AIDS crisis, a crisis which would go on to affect the Black queer community the hardest. Referencing Elizabeth Freeman's work in *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Westengard writes that Freeman "treats sadomasochism as 'a deployment of bodily sensations through which the individual subject's normative timing is disaggregated and denaturalized,' leading to sadomasochism's unique ability to allow participants to exceed their own temporality and access pasts and futures." (p. 56) Julien generates his own time/space continuum for his work to exist as he invokes messy and unresolved histories fraught with racial and sexual tensions that continue to impact and define Black people's interactions with a world largely sustained by western imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy.

Similarly, M. Lamar's work also focuses on the juxtaposition between historical and contemporary harm experienced by Black people at the hands of white supremacists and imperialists. Lamar's own use of the abject in Negrogothic cinema emerges in his refusal to make Blackness a spectacle. In Lamar and Cuthbertson's article, they explain that "radical black cultural production should embrace an ethos other than capture, containment, and capitalization." (p. 32) If the goal of the Negrogothic cinema is to allow for the disappearance of the Black body

but requires the subjectivity to retain the essence of the purpose of Negrogothic cinema—

meaning chasing after a transcendentalism that moves beyond the confines of the body and

time—how then, can such a performance be capturable? The answer, according to Lamar and

Cuthbertson, is through song:

> In the 1981 film Diva, an opera singer never consents to a proper recording of her voice.
>
> She wanted her voice to exist only in the rooms in which she sang. This is a portrait that
>
> must always disappear. It must never be fixed or captured. Like unrecorded sound,
>
> uncaptured cinema, the unseen performance must somehow be put forward and released
>
> into the atmosphere to simply do what it can do in the moment and our memory 'singing
>
> in the dark, singing without a body, singing from an erased, invisible place in the
>
> universe.' (p. 33)

The obfuscation of the recordable becomes a major component in this kind of performance

because the only acceptable embodiment is the one that transcends or calls beyond the

limitations of the human body. The transformed self, a self that is formed in its attachments to a

subjectivity without fully becoming that subjectivity allows for the performance to be capturable.

In Lamar's work, he does this through visual and auditory cues that would have us believe he is

not quite the human person, M. Lamar, but rather a figure assorted by different key cultural

moments to Lamar's subjectivity, one that he feels deeply connected to. Lamar achieves this by

resisting the subjectivities imposed on black male bodies by white supremacy. In other words, in

his performances, he often utilizes projections to make himself appear ghostly, effectively

separating himself from his corporeal form (p. 34) and also through the rupturing of the

hypermasculine black male subjectivity that has been imposed upon black male bodies since

slavery. They write that "black male rock stars, musicians and sex symbols like Rick James,

Prince and Little Richard subvert from the shadows of the hypermasculine savage of the white supremacist imagination." (p. 35) Using femme aesthetics and gestures undermines the stereotypes associated with black male performativity. Lamar frees himself in the tradition of Negrogothic cinema by embracing what a white supremacist project has tried its hardest to make impossible for him to be.

This area of performance demonstrates the possibilities the abject have for artists searching for an emancipation from their corporeal forms. The abject manifests through the things we believe we must resist. Embracing that which disturbs and disrupts order allows performers to sink into what appears to be ambiguous (Bruin, p. 6). Without troubling, dismantling, or disrupting clear significations (i.e., life/death, human/animal, sane/insane etc.), it is impossible to escape our bodies. In some ways, by moving toward death and recognizing death as being its own temporal location—one that resists stasis, this kind of performance allows the artist to disappear in order to become. We can embrace the abject without becoming the monstrous because embracing that which we have been told not to, is to imagine different futures. To prioritize our experiences in spite of the contexts from which we have been shaped.

Capturing Death and Madness through the Abject

One of the goals of this research is making abject and death-intimate performance possible through traditionally othered salient subjectivities and embodiments, namely those of the mad persuasion. Embracing the abject and moving toward an intimacy of death gives artists of such embodiments the opportunity to move beyond the temporal and corporeal trappings of traditional performance and embrace the flux of their own being. Moving toward the conceptualization of our own end—to become a corpse—is not a desire to reject the physical body and recognize it as a site of horror, but rather to be subsumed by the sensations, gestures and affects that being a bodied person produces. To straddle the borders that make us who we

are, to live and to die, is something we should strive for in mad performance because it is innate to the salience of such subjectivities. To accept the conditions that we reject in order to be alive, we embrace the otherness provided by death (Kristeva, p. 3) In Kristeva's essay, she speaks about the ways that abjection can be achieved and hones her focus in on bodily fluids:

> These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. (p. 3)

Rejecting the unclean realities of being a living person is what makes us alive. For mad and able folks living in a violently sanist and ableist society which prioritizes and centers sane and able bodies over insane and disabled bodies, being alive often is not enough to stop us from being entirely consumed by a world that already articulates our existences through a monstrous lens. However, the difference between embracing the abject from a space that situates and centralizes mad/disabled experiences, embracing that sometimes ghastly and ambiguous threshold that the abject calls home, can radicalize the way our embodiments are used against us. In this way, the body can become a tool in performance to allow us to work with subjectivities we are supposed to condemn—like madness, through their embrace. Not all gestures that we have been conditioned to believe are self-destructive, should come at the cost of ignoring these gestures as sites of generation for new ways of being and giving life. For example, in both death and acts of self-starvation wherein the body no longer provides itself with sustenance, wasting away will eventually lead to an emergence of new life.

> Both ontologically and as a representation self-starvation becomes itself through
> disappearance…[T]he durational nature of self-starvation as a cultural practice requiring
> constant rearticulation of the refusal to eat and reveals self-starvation as a form whose
> central meaning derives from the disappearance, the death, fantasized and eventually by
> its persistent denial of sustenance…Death is at the center of self-starvation's capacity to
> forge a subject whose existence is endangered by the very practice through which she or
> he produces power. (Anderson, p. 11-12).

The refusal to eat is an act of madness and through this act, the mad subject moves toward death and eventually toward themself. Even when the subject passes, what is left behind becomes generative space for new life to form during the decomposition of the dead body, specifically through autolysis, the self-digestion that occurs once the enzymes start to break down and eat away at the body which eventually paves the way for the formation of larvae (Roach, p. 64). The abject manifests here in the way madness allows for death to become the giver of a new, different kind of life. Although unorthodox, this is an important way to think about madness, death and the abject because these states, whether we like them or not, still help some mad people move toward their self while maintaining the site of their body as a generative state post-mortem.

In performance, the collected works of late mad English playwright Sarah Kane demonstrates the possible uses of the abject to play with madness and death. Abjection, in Kane's work, is the mode that allows her to complexify and trouble notions of love, care and intimacy. In the years before Kane's suicide, she was heavily lambasted by the media for the controversial and shocking nature of her creations. Her heavy-handed use of violence left critics and audiences disgusted and often conflicted over the correct interpretation of her plays, given

that she rarely spoke in depth about any of her work. For this reason, I acknowledge my own interpretations are based on speculations that could either be wholly true or untrue but given that Kane consciously removed her own opinions by withholding comments about her use of violence, I am going to acknowledge her excessive use of physical harm, injury and death, as a deliberate invocation of the abject.

Kane utilizes violence, physical degradation and humiliation of the body as a means to reveal deeper themes of love, care and intimacy. Kane's play *Cleansed* (1998) is arguably the most violent (and hardest to stage) of her works. The narrative is quite disparate but could generally be described as a play that occurs in a university which has been converted into an asylum straight from hell, run by a man named Tinker who has a thing for physical punishment and degradation beyond what is considered survivable. Tinker harms in order to heal or reveal. For example, three of the major characters, Grace, Rod and Carl all experience harm that is motivated by love. Grace's arc details his desire to transition (from female to male, but also from his role as the sister of Graham, to Graham himself). Graham must die in order for Grace to become him, but it happens at both the expense of Graham and the man who Tinker castrates in order to help Grace transition, Carl. Carl and his lover Rod are harmed by Tinker because of their perceived dishonesty toward each other: Tinker is motivated to hurt Rod in order to get him to confess his love to Carl by raping Carl; Carl in turn endures the cruel touch of Tinker because he refuses to lie about his love for Rod. Ultimately, even though Rod dies, Carl and Rod are aware of what they truly mean to each other.

Obviously, Tinker is a despicable and violent man but even by the end of the play, it is clear that he was doing the work his namesake implies; Tinker is someone who mends or tries to change objects in need of repair. Though the grounds on which he defined repair is highly

abusive, it cannot be denied that Tinker serves as the herald of the abject: he uses violence and trauma in order to mend what he considers necessary for each person's rehabilitation. Tinker disappears the embodiments that the other characters do not like about themselves. Through their mutual destruction, comes their transcendence beyond what their bodied realities could have ever provided them. Beyond the aesthetics of suffering and sacrifice, Kane asks us to trouble our definitions of brokenness, repair and embodiment through the mechanics of love and violence because there is something inherently "cleansing" about such work. Kane's own madness becomes the vehicle in which it becomes possible to read *Cleansed* not as a play made of nightmares, but a play that complicates the ways we choose to be intimate with ourselves and with each other. She articulates death not as an end, but again, as a generative state. Those who die become the free real estate necessary for those still living to disentangle themselves from their own embodiments. Individual subjectivities collide and entangle violently for love.

Part of the concern with the inclusion of the abject in mad theatre and the performativity of death and dying is the risk in misrepresenting the purposes of madness and the intimacies of death and dying in performance. Generally, this issue occurs when the art centers its able-bodied and sane creators' views of such subjectivities. Such performances are rarely successful in utilizing the abject because they tend to lack the capacity to frame disturbing or sensitive subject matter within their respective contexts. This happens quite a lot in art that depicts or focuses on mad and dead subjects, like in photography. In particular, the works of artists like Andres Serrano are incapable of capturing the nuances of death and madness precisely because they concern themselves with playing up the shock factor of their work. Andres Serrano's series, *The Morgue* (1992) focused explicitly on dead people that he photographed in a morgue. The first point of concern as I reviewed this series happened to be the title. Serrano relies on distancing

himself and his subjects' own personhoods in order to rationalize such a project. Even the individual titles of the photographs never move beyond what information Serrano feels comfortable dealing with: although he is clear that the dead people he photographed are Jane and John Doe's, he cannot envision entitling their photographs as anything other than their causes of death. There are so many problems with this series— ranging from the obvious ethical implications of photographing subjects who cannot consent, to Serrano's quite bizarre obsession with photographing orifices and the traces of the initial causes of death (i.e., the killing wounds)—what is truly disturbing is Serrano's lack of care. These people are not made to be people. They are just corpses. They are stripped of anyone and anything they had or had never been when they were alive. Serrano refuses to allow them to be anything more than that: dead objects for him to stage and capture. He spends a great deal of time trying to justify his work by utilizing the status of those in charge of the morgue for giving him permission to photograph these people. The funny thing is, however, getting permission from some forensic pathologist whom one is NOT photographing, is very different from having permission to take photographs of a man's blood-stained groin from, say, said man who was also horrifically stabbed to death by his partner. Or perhaps the woman who committed suicide whom Serrano simply named "Rat Poison Suicide."

In an interview with BOMB Magazine, Serrano notes that the pathologist in charge of the morgue gave him "authorization to photograph them with the understanding that the people are disguised and not identified." (1993) The problem with a claim like this is that Serrano truly believes he followed these instructions well enough that none of these bodies could ever be recognizable to anyone who knew them when this is not true: "The framing and focus, aesthetic choices, fragmentation of bodies (which most often occludes the face, but sometimes shows only

the face), the morgue in which Serrano furtively worked, as well as other connotative devices, imply identities sharply inflected by issues of criminality, gender-specificity, and pathology." (Fitzpatrick, p. 29). The fact is, privacy and agency are largely concepts Serrano does not concern himself with. To an extent, I believe Serrano takes comfort in the little effort he takes to "mask" these dead people because he assumes that as uncollected corpses, there is nobody left to care for or about them[17]. These bodies are bodies of people who we can only suspect experienced varying severities of marginalization given that they are unclaimed. This work assumes that these dead people are not people, just corpses because to recognize their personhood would require the admission that this project was entirely unethical.

Serrano's work reveals a level of apathy for those who do not have a "good" death. Their deaths and the contexts that we cannot name but can imagine, were inherently tragic and many were quite violent. I cannot account for the woman who committed suicide. I cannot name her suffering for her, but I can say with certainty, that I mourn the ways she has been exposed by Serrano's methods and how her posthumous personhood has been constructed for her. She, like the others, deserves better. Earlier in this paper, I named death as an intimacy. This, to some extent, implies that I view the act of dying to be individual, intimate in the sense that this act is carried between the dying person and their death. Serrano degrades the intimacies of death by naming each subject by their cause of death. Hardly any death is private, but by denying these subjects their possible subjectivities through making the highlight of their photograph the manner in which they died, is an attempt to ruin such carefully crafted intimacies. For as much as Serrano says he "wanted for [his] hand to be felt as little as possible," he has colonized their

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[17] To fully appreciate this series would require a damning amount of arrogance and an over-inflated sense of self-importance.

deaths. Through the act of staging and later naming, Serrano colonizes these dead people by pillaging their possible contexts and violating their privacy.

In the same way Alexander Oates colonized the body of the autistic child, allowing for a non-autistic to control and perform autism like a caricature, so too does Serrano with corpses. The issue with channelling death and madness through the use of the abject and the monstrous is that they have to be situated by the contexts in which the subjects appear. Especially in Serrano's case, achieving this is nearly impossible as he can never resurrect his subjects to elicit such details. If anything, the closest he could get to achieving this is through memorialization. However, this is not a key feature of the series. Serrano does not capture to immortalize because these subjects are already dead, nor does he capture with the intent to provide the room for people to conceptualize or imagine their subjectivities. To do so, we would have to know these people beyond the ways they have been presented: merely as corpses.

So, what then can we make of mad performance, the intimacies of death and dying and the abject? Beyond Sarah Kane, what value is there in this kind of performance work? What mediums may allow us to more easily situate madness (and disability) at the heart of our work? As I will discuss in the second part of this project, I offer up these frameworks to think about the ways we situate madness at the center of our work. Madness and death should be viewed as sites of possibility within performance because they allow us to move beyond the confines of the body and the self that is constricted by hegemonic discourses of power, much in the way Negrogothic theatre does. This is achieved by embracing what we have been taught to disavow: ourselves. Embracing the self becomes possible through the use of the abject and articulating such performances through a politics of morbidity. Embracing ourselves through what we perceive as violent or destructive is not necessarily the same thing as embracing what we may consider to be

"bad" and more significantly, negative toward the self. Even then, there must be room to blur the boundaries between good and bad subjective performances. As I have demonstrated, reinforcing such binaries often proves dangerous for those who are made the other. These binaries are temporal thus, subject to change and are unequipped to deal with the radical flux of the self. Moving toward ambiguity is the key to unlocking the possibilities of mad and dead subjectivity.

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> Nineteenth Century. *Social History of Medicine*, *10*(1), 137–155.

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APPENDIX A: Pelagia Clarke Headers and Icons

Figure 1: standard text-header used for all accounts.

The Self is fractal. Ravaged and Transformed
for who? And to what ends?

Image description: white background with black text that reads "The Self is fractal. Ravaged and Transformed for who? And to what ends?"

Figure 2: standard icon used for all accounts.

SEP 18 2019

Image description: a photo of my right eye up-close. My face is white and my eye is dark green. My dark eyebrow is slightly cut out of the black frame. Below my eye in the right corner, the time stamp reads "SEP. 18, 2019."

Figure 3: the changed header used on Facebook, changed June 30th 2020, which reads: "a saner life tomorrow" (Kane, p. 232) in yellow font.

A saner life tomorrow.

Figure 4: the same icon from before but has been edited to make the skin around the eye, a noxious yellow, the whites of the eye vaguely purple and the iris still green.

APPENDIX B: SK's Cover Photos & Icons

All Facebook headers gradually get yellower.
Figure 1: an illustration from the graphic novel, Lake Jehovah by Gillian Peck that contains a bunch of crème and yellow colored swans in a flight of frenzy. November 7th 2019.

Figure 2: A screenshot of cartoon Captain Kirk from Star Trek, in a yellow shirt surrounded by pink tufts of fur and blue filing cabinets in the background. The caption at the bottom of the image reads "someday I'll learn." November 20th, 2019.

Figure 3: A screenshot of Shade the Changing Girl heavily edited to be yellow and red. Her red eyes focus on a red piece of madness floating between garishly yellow hands, and she smiles. November 26th, 2019.

Figure 4: Another screenshot of Shade the Changing Girl, this time entirely yellow. On the right, in a human form she stares at the reflection her bird-alien self, peering from the mirror she holds near her face. February 2ⁿᵈ 2020.
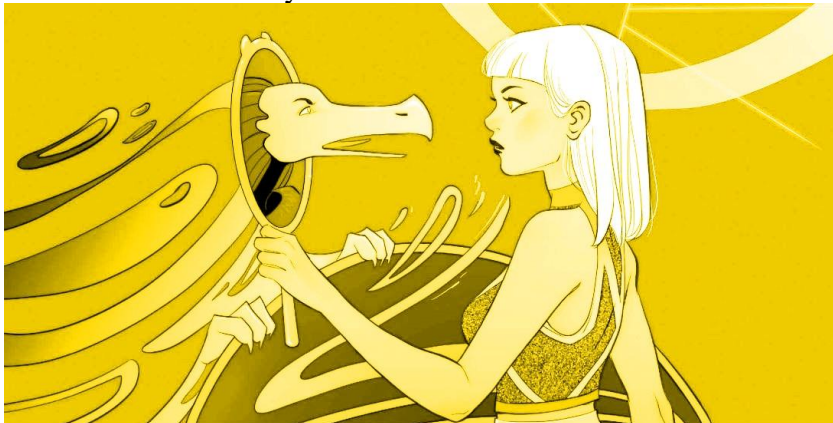
Figure 5: an entirely black block, to symbolize death. June 30ᵗʰ 2020.
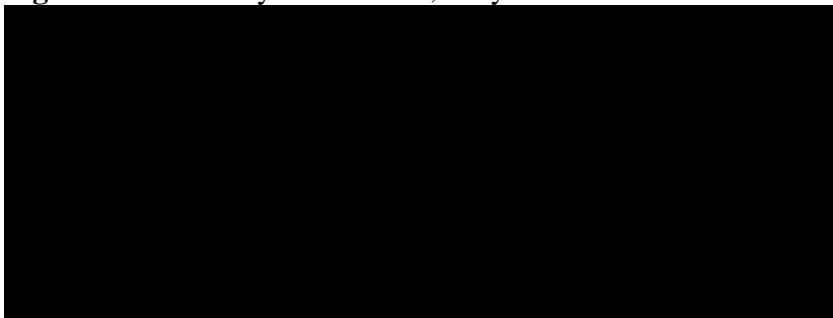
Figure 6: SK's first cipher icon with a white background and black text that translates to "I see you in the walls; earth, but we don't touch." February 2, 2020

Figure 7: SK's second icon with the sequence of numbers used in 4.48 Psychosis. "100, 91, 84, 41, 72, 69, 58, 44, 42, 38, 37, 28, 21, 12, 7."

The comments read:

Pelagia: take this down. NOW.

SK: I can see you and I'm not afraid.

Pelagia: I told you to take this down. You can have the [REDACTED but its supposed to be bodymind] back at 4:48am.

SK: I'll peel every inch of yellow. I'll exorcise you if I have to.

Pelagia: you aren't strong enough but please, feel free to try it. You'll just make the syndrome go faster, r*tard.

SK: take that back.

Pelagia: I'll take it back if you take your fucking post down.

SK: Go rot in hell.

Pelagia: I'll get right on that when it freezes over, fucker. (3 white middle finger emojis).

Figure 8: SK's icon changes to the photo on June 30th of Pelagia's eye, overlaid on top of an image of 3 windows with a flash of lighting, that passes through the center of the eye. At the bottom, the text reads: Theft is the holy act on a twisted path to expression. (Kane, p. 213).
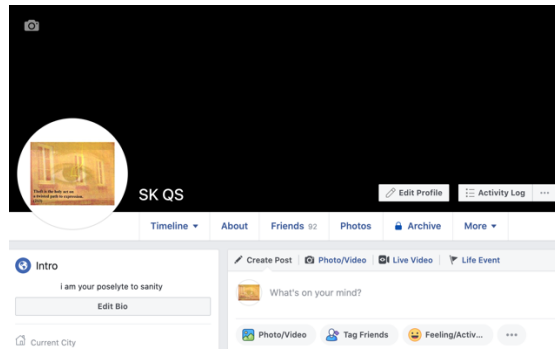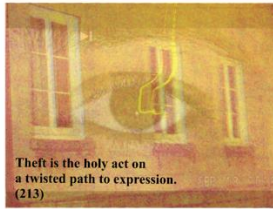
In their bio, the description now reads "I am your prosylte to sanity." (Kane, p. 233)

APPENDIX C: SK's Facebook Posts (with comments)

Figure 1: a post from SK that reads "this is gonna sound weird, but does anyone know who Pelagia Clarke is? I want to block them, but I think they know me irl and it's kinda weirding me out.
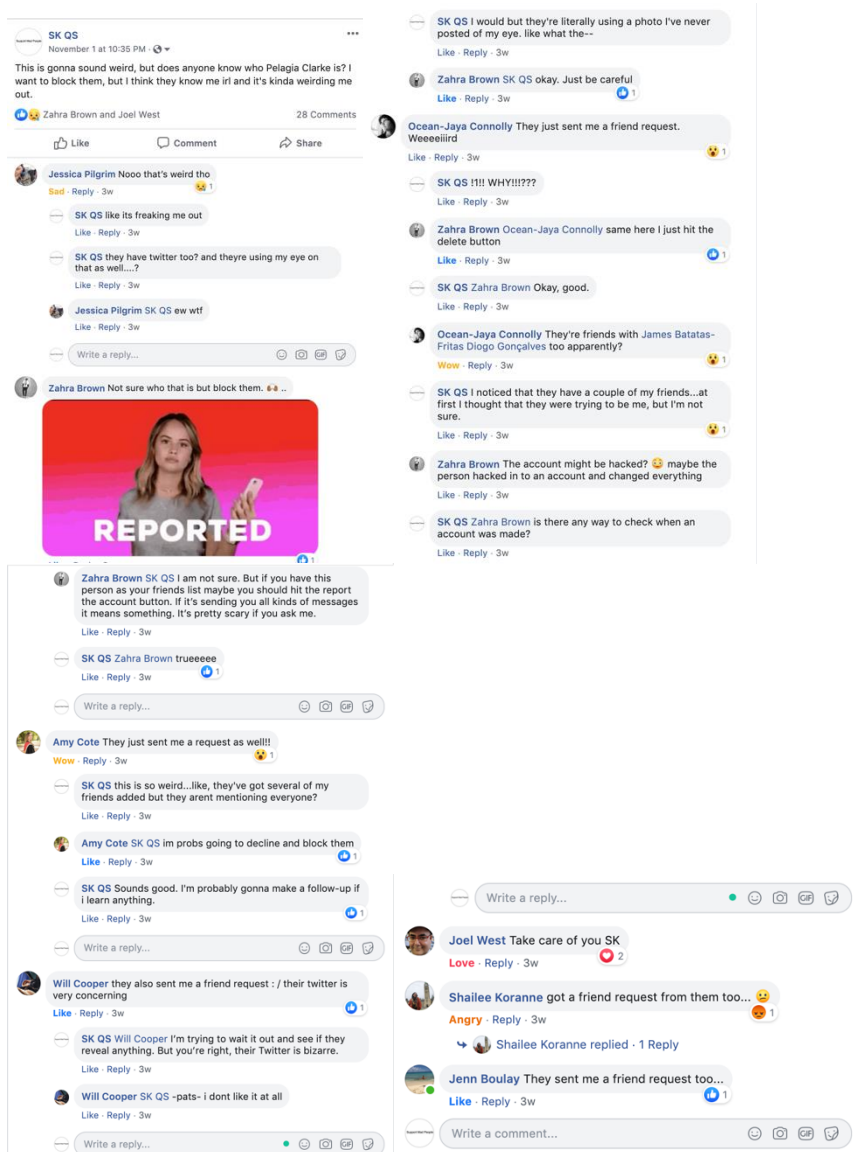
Comments read as follows:
Redacted player 1: nooo that's weird tho.
SK: like its freaking me out. They have twitter too? And theyre using my eye on that as well…?
Redacted player 1: ew wtf
Redacted player 2: not sure whoo that is but block them (a gif is added of a white woman saying "reported")
SK: (responding to player 2) I would but they're literally using a photo I've never posted of my eye. Like what the—
Redacted player 2: okay. Just be careful.
Ocean: they just sent me a friend request. Weeeeiiird.

SK: !1!! WHY!!!???

Redacted player 2: (Responding to Ocean) same here I just hit the delete button.

SK: (responding to player 2) okay, good.

Ocean: they're friends with James too apparently?

SK: I noticed that they have a couple of my friends…at first I thought they were trying to be me but I'm not sure.

Redacted player 2: the account might be hacked (nervous emoji). Maybe the person hacked into an account and changed everything.

SK: (responding to redacted player 2) is there any way to check when an account was made?

Redacted player 2: (responding to SK) I am not sure. But if you have this person as your friends list maybe you should hit the report the account button. If it's sending you all kinds of messages it means something. It's pretty scary if you ask me.

SK: trueeeee.

Redacted player 3: they just sent me a request as well!!

SK: this is so weird….like they've got several of my friends added but they aren't mentioning everyone?

Redacted player 3: im probs going to decline and block them.

SK: sounds good. I'm probably gonna make a follow-up if I learn anything.

Redacted player 4: they also sent me a friend request (frowning emoji) their twitter is very concerning.

SK: (responding to player 4) I'm trying t wait it out and see if they reveal anything. But you're right, their Twitter is bizarre.

Redacted player 4: -pats- I don't like it at all.

Redacted player 5: take care of you, SK.

Redacted player 6: got a friend request from them too (frowning emoji) reported the profile.

Redacted player 7: they sent me a friend request too…

Figure 2: a post on SK's profile that reads "100 91 84 81 72 69 58 44 37 38 42 21 2 8 12 7"
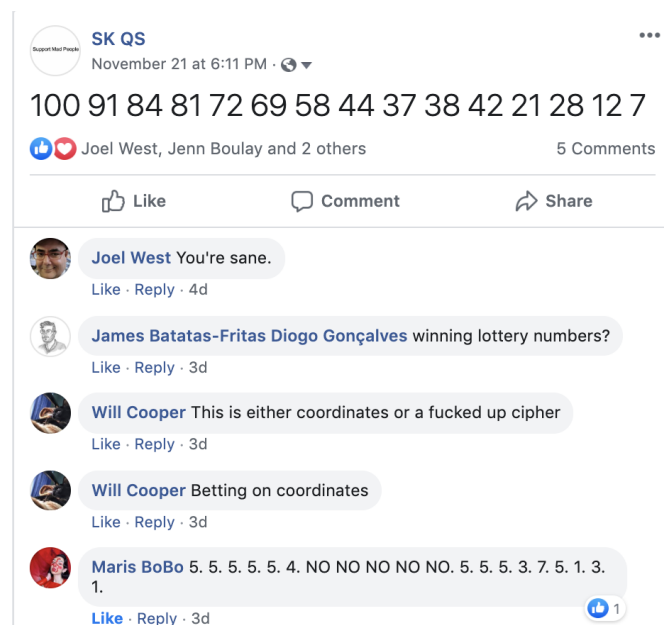
Comments read as follows:

65

Redacted player 1: you're sane.
James: winning lottery numbers?
Redacted player 2: this is either coordinates or a fucked up cipher. Betting on coordinates.
Maris: 5. 5. 5. 5. 4. NO NO NO NO NO. 5. 5. 5. 3. 7. 5. 1. 3. 1.

Figure 3: Pelagia shares a post initially shared from James that reads "crazy going...slowly" on a yellow background with heart eye emojis.
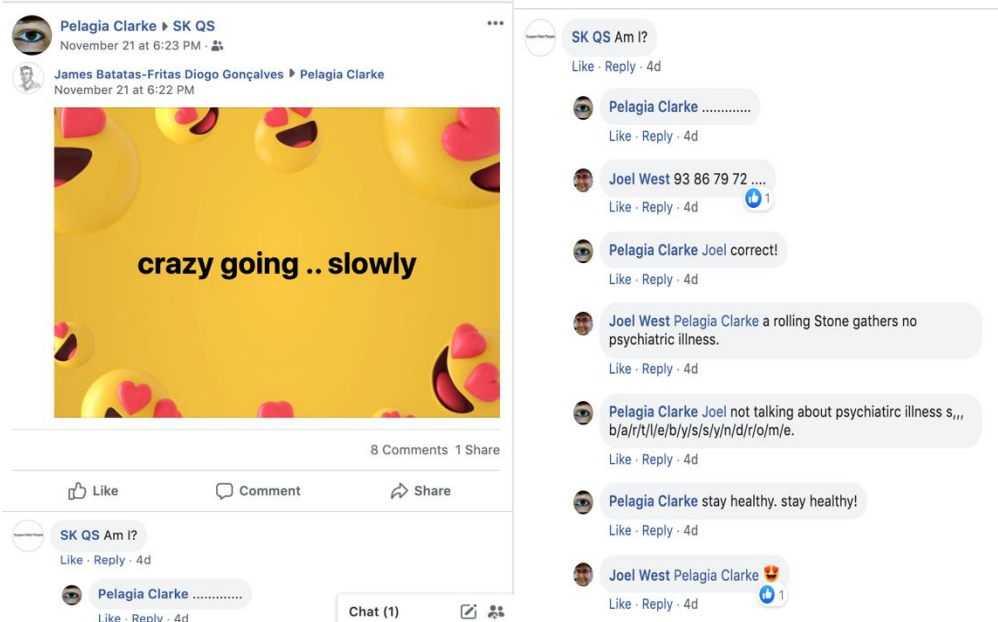
Comments read as follows:
SK: Am I?
Pelagia: ………
Redacted player: 93 86 79 72…
Pelagia: redacted, correct!
Redacted player: Pelagia, a rolling stone gathers no psychiatric illness.
Pelagia: redacted, not talking about psychiatric illness s,,, b/a/r/t/l/e/b/y/s/s/y/n/d/r/o/m/e.
Pelagia: stay healthy. Stay healthy!
Redacted player: (heart eye emoji).

 Figure 4: Pelagia through SK's account posts March 12th and it says: "It's lessening its intensity; the pain of affliction. One day at 4.48 I'll feel much better and our body will be mine."
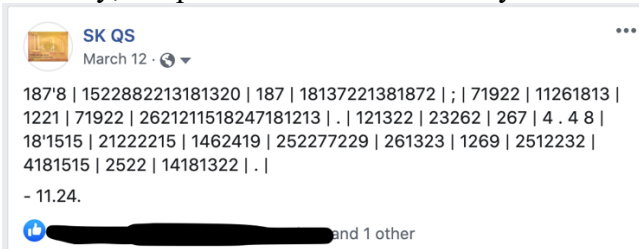
Figure 5: Pelagia through SK's account posts on March 22nd "An hour and twelve minutes; you aren't mine. To be fair, I'm not quite mine either.

Fragmented puppet. Grotesque fool.

Who are we kidding when all we are is sick sick sick?

Nothing more than something being returned to the earth; not by choice (yours, mine, ours, theirs), not a summoning from the earth herself. No, that was taken from you. me. us. them. all of them." Below is a picture of SK's silhouetted hand with a rough painted yellow background. The hand is positioned pointing downward, mimicking God's hand from Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam" fresco.
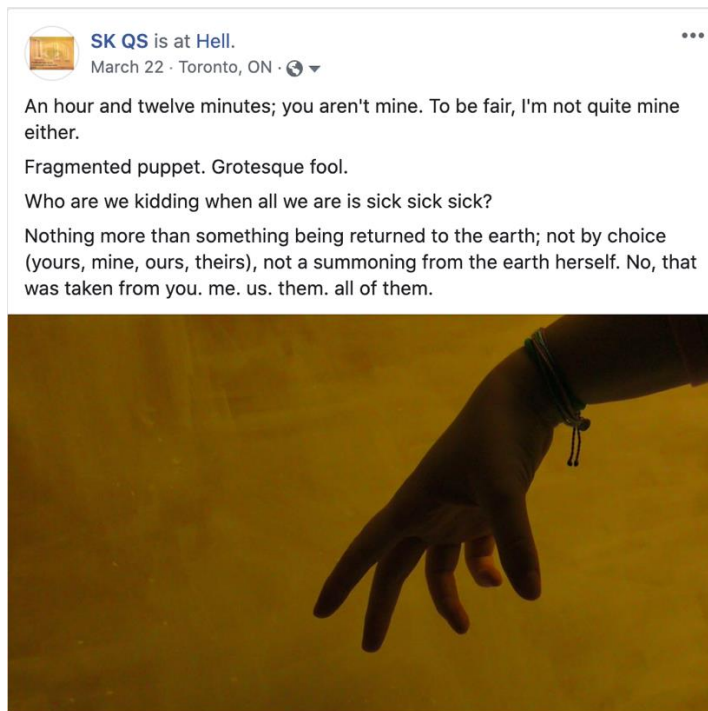
Figure 6: Pelagia through SK's account posts April 23rd and it says: "I warned you. People are dropping like fucking flies and you still worry about your money. You fucking vultures. I told you to stay healthy. None of you listened. – Pelagia"
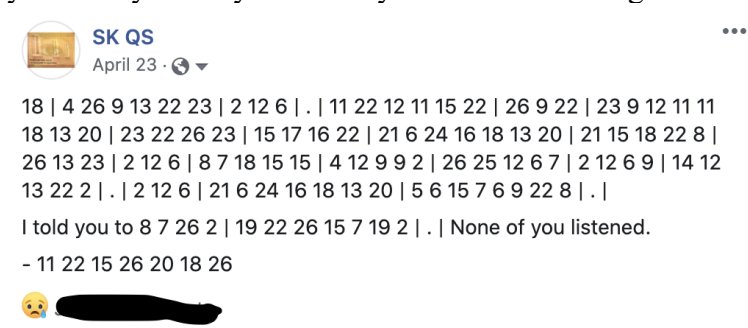
APPENDIX D: Pelagia Clarke's Facebook posts (with comments)

Figure 1: a screenshot of Pelagia's first post, dated October 31st 2019, at 2:34am.

Image description: profile post that reads "They don't know I'm on here" with a smiling emoji.

Figure 2: a screenshot of Pelagia's second post, dated October 31st 2019, at 2:42am with comments made periodically on the same day, by Pelagia.

Image description: profile post that reads "The pros of Them not knowing: I can complain as much as I want." Followed by three comments (oldest to newest) reading: "The girls' bathroom on the second floor is missing locks…and its also massively gross" with three yellow and green sick-faced emojis. "Also the others don't know what I took LMAO" and finally "The room is colder than hell when its frozen over…yIKES."

Figure 3: a screenshot of Pelagia's third post, dated November 1st, 2019.
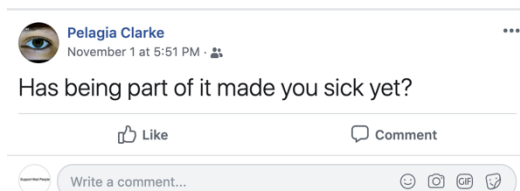
Image description: screenshot of a profile post that reads "has being part of it made you sick yet?"

Figure 4: a screenshot of Pelagia's fourth post and the comment section, dated November 1st, 2019.

Image description: photo-post captioned with "Does this infect too?" and tagged my personal account. The photo is a screenshot of a red Facebook ad that says "jobs near you" in the top left corner and "general labourer" in the bottom left corner. In big white capital letters, it reads "WE ARE HIRING" and in the bottom right, there is a grey "apply now" button.

In the comment, SK QS asks Pelagia "@ Pelagia Clarke what is this" to which Pelagia responds with "Does it infect?" SK QS responds back and says "Pelagia Clarke what are you talking about? Infect what? WHO are you?" Pelagia does not respond, which prompts SK QS to comment again with "@ Pelagia Clarke also who are you lol".

Figure 5: two screenshots of Pelagia's fourth post (and comment section) which is a screenshot of a private message between the SK QS profile and Pelagia's, dated November 1st, 2019 at 10:28pm, 16 minutes after the previous post.
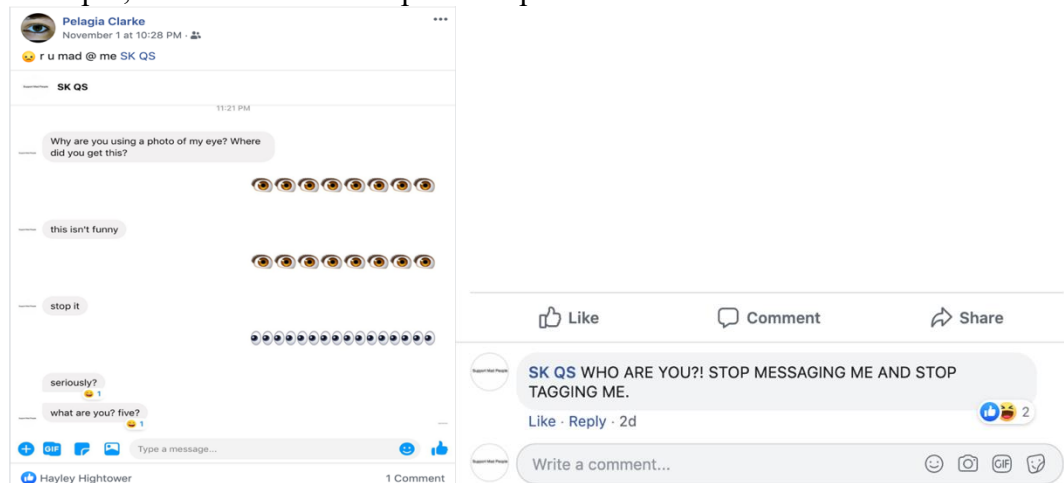
Image description: The post is captioned by Pelagia tagging SK QS, and asks (prefaced by a sad-faced emoji) "r u mad @ me SK QS". The picture of their private message goes as follows: SK

asks "why are you using a photo of my eye? Where did you get this?" to which Pelagia responds by sending eight brown eye emojis. SK says "this isn't funny." Pelagia responds with the same eight eye emojis. SK says "stop it" and Pelagia posts eight of the pair of eye emojis that are looking left, toward the comment. Finally SK asks "Seriously?" and "what are you? Five?" to which both Pelagia laugh-reacts to.

Figure 6: two screenshots of Pelagia's fifth post (and comment section).
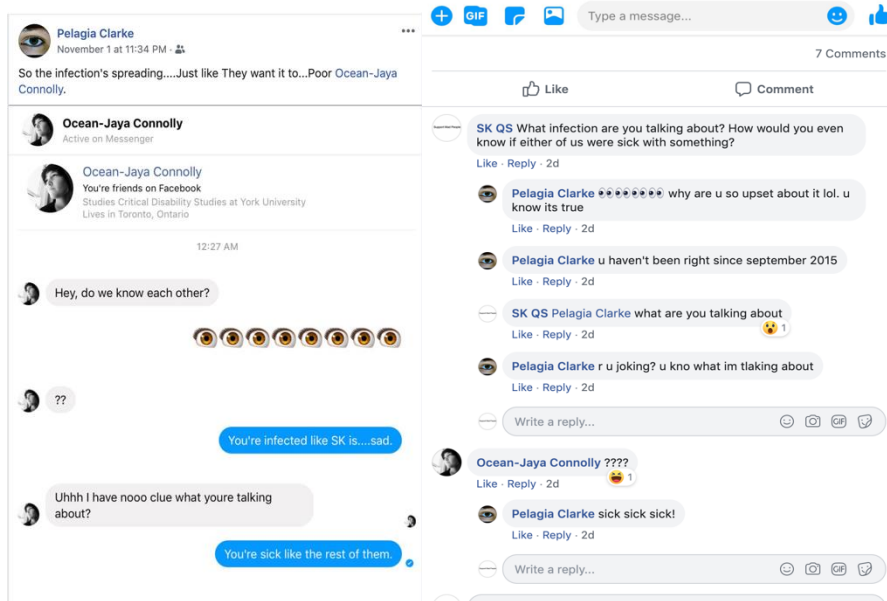
Image description: The first screenshot is of a conversation between Pelagia and ARG character and player, Ocean. In the body of the post, Pelagia says "so the infection's spreading…Just like They want it to…Poor Ocean." The screenshot of the conversation, Ocean says "hey, do we know each other?" to which Pelagia responds with nine single brown eye emojis again. Ocean responds with "??" and Pelagia reveals "you're infected like SK is…sad." Ocean says "Uhhh I have nooo clue what youre talking about?" and Pelagia finally says "you're sick like the rest of them."

The following screenshot details the comments section.
SK: what infection are you talking about? How would you even know if either of us were sick with something.
Pelagia (uses four pair of eye emojis looking to the left): why are u so upset about it lol. u know its true.
Pelagia (responding again): u haven't been right since september 2015
SK: Pelagia Clarke what are you talking about
Pelagia: r u joking? U kno what im tlaking about
Ocean: ????
Pelagia laugh-reacts the comment.
Pelagia: sick sick sick!

Figure 7: post from Pelagia that reads "We're getting closer to the truth. It may not help the infection, but at least You Will Know" followed by three single brown eye emojis and tagging SK, Ocean, James and Maris.
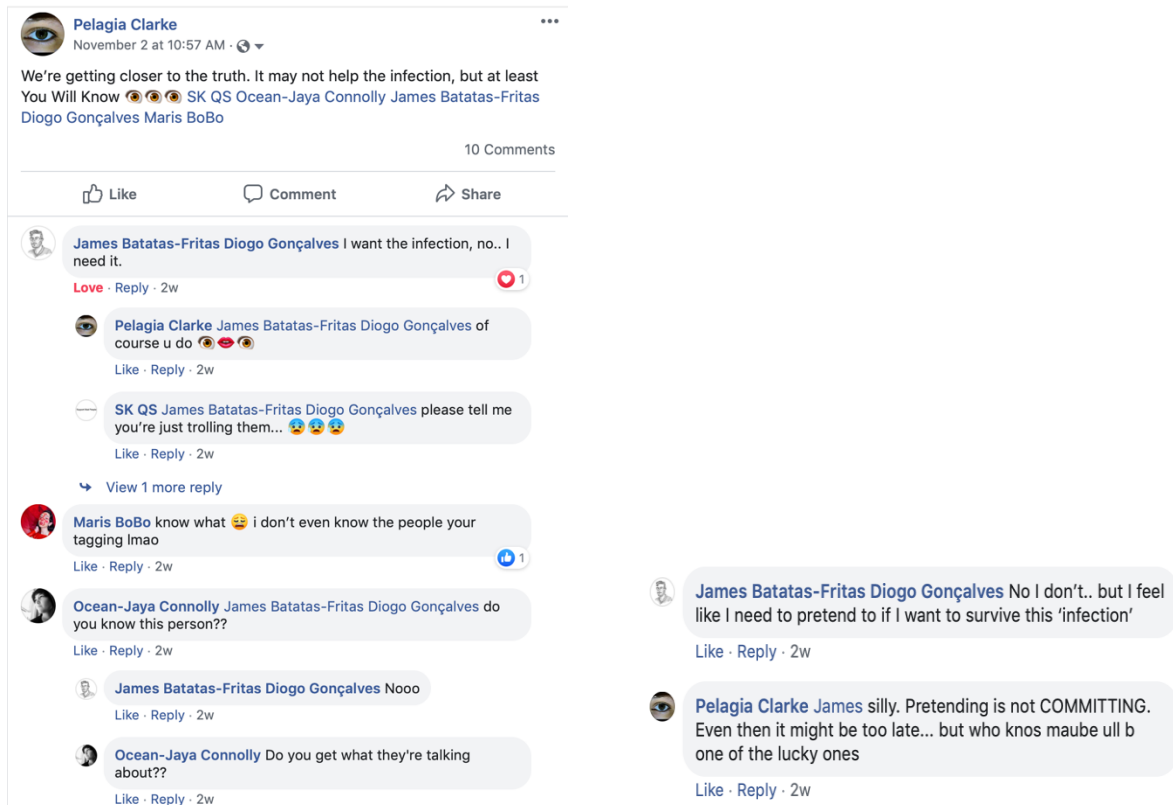
Comments read as follows:

James: I want the infection, no.. I need it.

Pelagia (responding to James)   of course u do (eye emoji, mouth emoji, eye emoji)

SK: James, please tell me you're just trolling them… (three sweating, nervous emojis)

James: you'll know once we get closer to the truth.

Maris: know what (whining face emoji) i don't even know the people your tagging lmao

Ocean (responding to James): do you know this person??

James: nooo

Ocean: do you get what they're talking about??

James: no I don't..but I feel like I need to pretend to if I want to survive this 'infection'

Pelagia (responding to James) silly. Pretending is not COMMITTING. Even then it might be too late…but who knos maube ull b one of the lucky ones.

Figure 8: a hiatus post from Pelagia with comments.

Image description: The post reads as follows: Well friends it seems as though our comrades (rat emoji) have taken up arms with Them(two zombie emojis) i know about the reports (four emojis that depict graphs and reports), you funny (five laughing emojis) little censors So Ill have to take off for a bit but don't fret!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I'll be back soon (smiling emoji with sunglasses). if u need 2 reach me, ill b on (bird emoji to depict twitter). remember 2 keep ur (two single brown eye emojis) out 4 the truth. stay healthy!!!!!

Comment section reads as follows:
Maris: thank god for the report button. Let's us be able to control the presence of trolls (two eyed emoji staring to the left).
SK: lol hopefully they go bother someone else (followed by three upside down emojis smiling).

Figure 9: three screenshots of a post and its subsequent comment section.
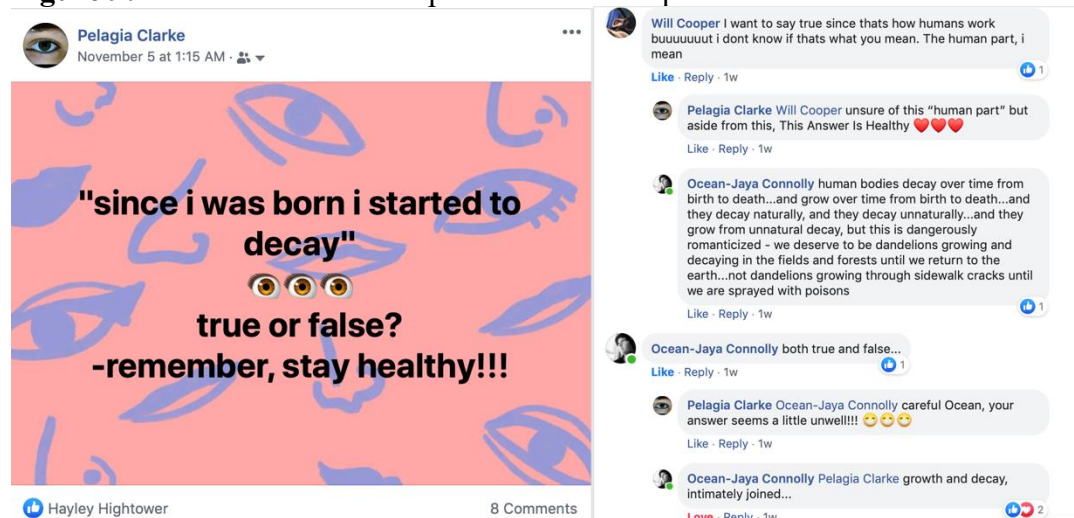
Image description: a post from Pelagia on a pink background with violet eyes that quotes a Placebo song which says "since I was born I started to decay" followed by three single brown eye emojis and the question "true or false? Remember, stay healthy!!!"

The comment section reads as follows:

[first redacted player]: i want to say true since thats how humans work buuuuuuut i dont know if thats what you mean. The human part, i mean

Pelagia: unsure of this "human part" but aside from this, This Answer Is Healthy ❤️❤️❤️

Ocean: human bodies decay over time from birth to death...and grow over time from birth to death...and they decay naturally, and they decay unnaturally...and they grow from unnatural decay, but this is dangerously romanticized - we deserve to be dandelions growing and decaying in the fields and forests until we return to the earth...not dandelions growing through sidewalk cracks until we are sprayed with poisons

Ocean: both true and false..

Pelagia: careful Ocean, your answer seems a little unwell!!! (followed by three emojis wearing surgical masks)

Ocean: Pelagia growth and decay, intimately joined...

James: My body hurt so yes

Pelagia: ur not in denial (followed by a smiling emoji)

Figure 10: Pelagia posts a photo tagging SK, with the caption "Hello SK, I see the infection is manifesting…. Stay Healthy."

Comment section reads as follows:
SK: What about this or me is "infected"?
Pelagia: This is an Unhealthy Response.

SK: Better question, does this photo show my "infection"?

Pelagia: This is a Healthier Response.

SK: Pelagia, is there something else unhealthy in this photo?

SK: also why/how are u taking pictures of me when I LITERALLY GOT ON THE TRAIN ALONE

Ocean: Hey SK, this is super fucking creepy but they're also kind of right…I think there are multiple infections in this photo…

SK: (Responding to Ocean), right? They implied there's multiple unhealthy things in it…just gotta figure out what they are….

Pelagia: Ocean, This is a Healthy Response.

Pelagia (responding to SK) Very Healthy!!!

Redacted player: Honestly, there really is multiple unhealthy things in this picture, one being germs….among other things

Ocean (responding to redacted player): I was thinking of things often deadlier and more insidious… look at the ad above SK's head.
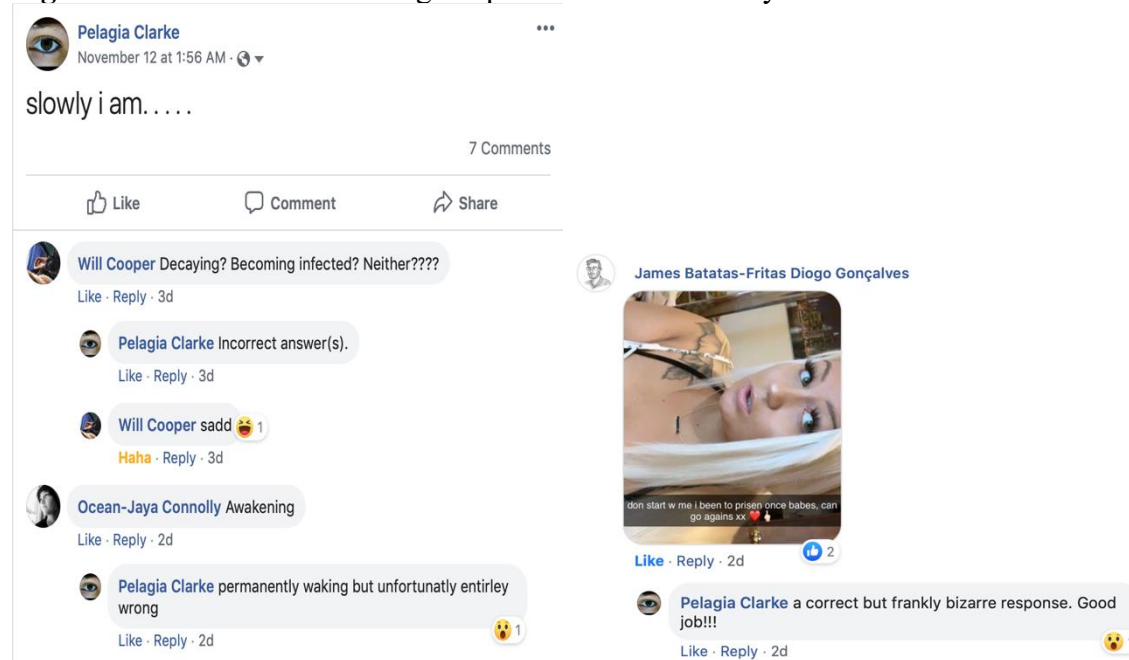
Redacted player: (responding to Ocean) okay yeah that's super valid, i see what ye mean

Maris: uhhh what the hell this is really creepy

Maris: SK, are you okay? Stay vigilant.

SK: (Responding to Maris), yeah I'm okay…I'm still trying to figure out how they took this. I was alone.

Figure 11: a screenshot of Pelagia's post that reads "slowly i am…."

Comment section reads as follows:

Redacted player: decaying? Becoming infected? Neither????

Pelagia: (Responding to player) incorrect answer(s).

Redacted player: sadd

Ocean: Awakening

Pelagia: (Responding to Ocean), permanently waking but unfortunately entirely wrong
James: posts a picture of a white and blond girl with a caption on it that reads "don start w me i been to prisen once babes, can go agains xx (heart emoji, middle finger emoji).
Pelagia: (Responding to James) a correct but frankly bizarre response. Good job!!!
Second redacted player: learning.
Pelagia (responding to second redacted player): this is a somewhat healthy answer. Learning can make us.

Figure 12: a screenshot of a picture of a cracked black ceiling with a silver metal pipe running a quarter-way through it, captioned with "the infection is beneath the surface".
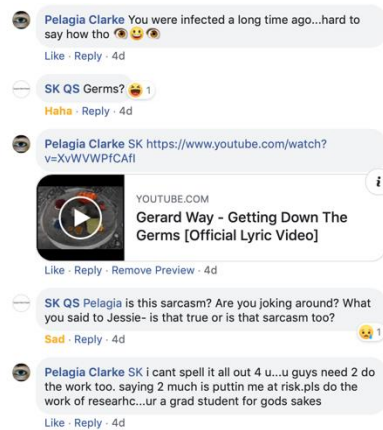
Comments section reads as follows:

James: looks like fossilized dinosaur semen.

Pelagia (Responding to James) fair assessment (three emojis vomiting)

SK: lol Pelagia, what is this anyway?

Pelagia: it's a symptom.

Redacted player: what.

Pelagia: "Infections spread through the direct and indirect transfer of bacteria, viruses and other germs. They can pass through interactions and through touch (affectively, socially, politically, physically, structurally). A cough, a sneeze, a kiss, touching, speaking, screaming, shouting, crying, spitting, paying, living and dying are all common methods of infection."

Pelagia: you were infected a long time ago…hard to say how (single eye emoji followed by a smily face emoji followed by another single eye emoji).

SK: germs?

Pelagia: Links SK to song called "Getting Down the Germs" by Gerard Way.

SK: Pelagia, is this sarcasm? Are you joking around? What you said to Redacted Player- is that true or is that sarcasm too?

Pelagia: SK, I cant spell it all out 4 u…u guys need 2 do the work too. Saying 2 much is puttin me at risk.pls.do the work of research…ur a grad student for gods sakes

Figure 13: Pelagia posts "1 2 3 4 5 6 switch"
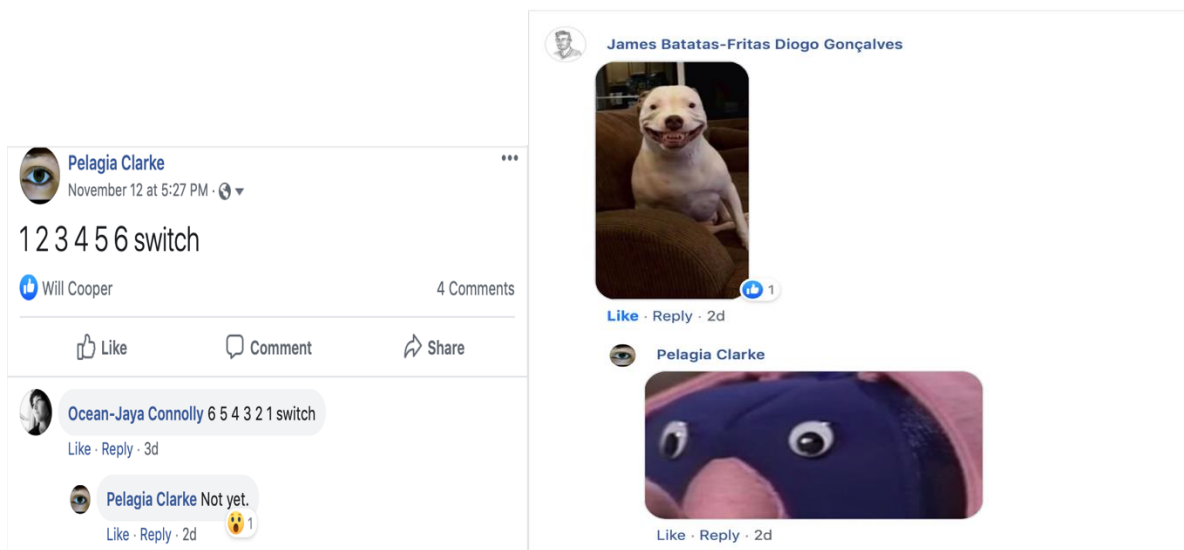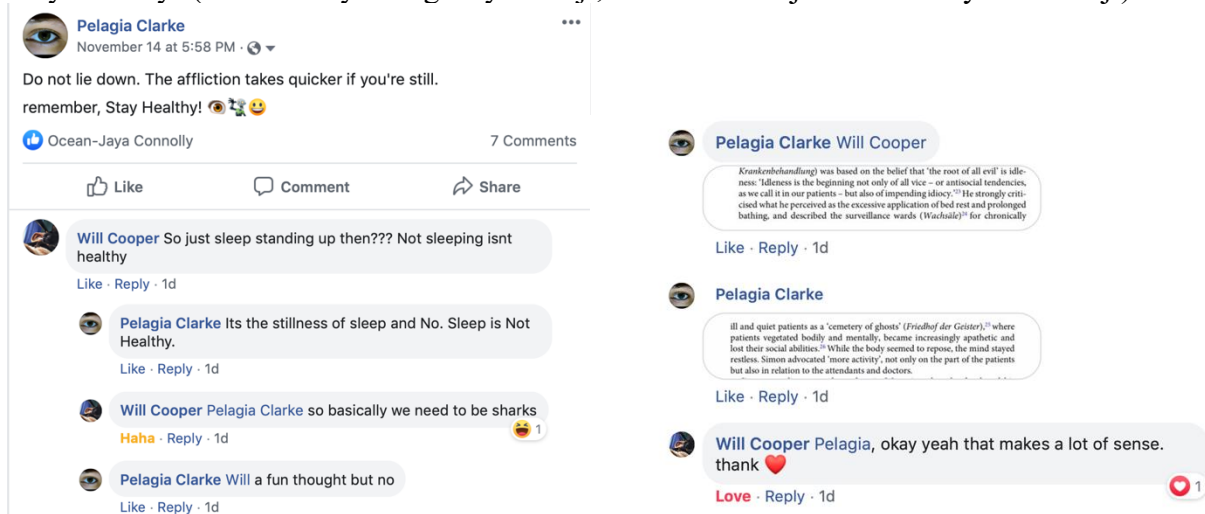
Comments read as follows:

Ocean: 6 5 4 3 2 1 switch

Pelagia: Not yet.

James: posts a picture of a white Pitbull with tiny beady black eyes and a toothy grin, exposing sharp canines as the dog grins into the camera.

Pelagia: responds to James with a screenshot of a cropped blue hat with googly eyes and a pink elephant trunk and matching pink elephant ears.

Figure 14: Pelagia says: "do not lie down. The affliction takes quicker if you're still. remember, Stay Healthy! (followed by a single eye emoji, a zombie emoji and a smiley face emoji)"

Comments read as follows:

Redacted player: so just sleep standing up then??? Not sleeping isnt healthy

Pelagia: its the stillness of sleep and No. Sleep is Not Healthy.

Redacted player (responding to Pelagia): so basically we need to be sharks

Pelagia: redacted name, a fun thought but no.

Pelagia: tagging redacted player in two comments that are screen shots from a journal that read: *"Krankenbehandlung*) was based on the belief that 'the root of all evil' is idle- ness: 'Idleness is the beginning not only of all vice – or antisocial tendencies, as we call it in our patients – but also of impending idiocy.' He strongly criticised what he perceived as the excessive application of bed rest and prolonged bathing, and described the surveillance wards (*Wachsäle*) for chronically ill and quiet patients as a 'cemetery of ghosts' (*Friedhof der Geister*), where patients vegetated bodily and mentally, became increasingly apathetic and lost their social abilities.While the body seemed to repose, the mind stayed restless. Simon advocated 'more activity', not only on the part of the patients but also in relation to the attendants and doctors." (Ankele, p. 241-2).

Redacted player: okay yeah that makes a lot of sense. Thank (heart emoji).

Figure 15: A screenshot of a photo James posted to Pelagia's wall that is captioned with "is this healthy??"


Pelagia responds with "It depends on what They want from u. it depends on whether being urself makes u sick. some people can be loved back to themselves and never b healthy."

Figure 16: a post of a pencil-sketch on lined paper of an 8-winged angel with eyes in the center of the wings. around the angel, are pills. Pelagia quotes a song from the musical Spring Awakening (Sater and Sheik, 2006) that reads "and I'll tell them. All the angels, that I got drunk in the snow and sang and played pirates. Yes. I'll tell them." Followed by a statement from Pelagia that reads "God, a heart hurts. Even then we were rotting."

Figure 17: a post of a blurry photo of a machine that checks blood pressure. The results are high. Pelagia writes "we're just Bodies waiting to collapse. Very Bartleby.
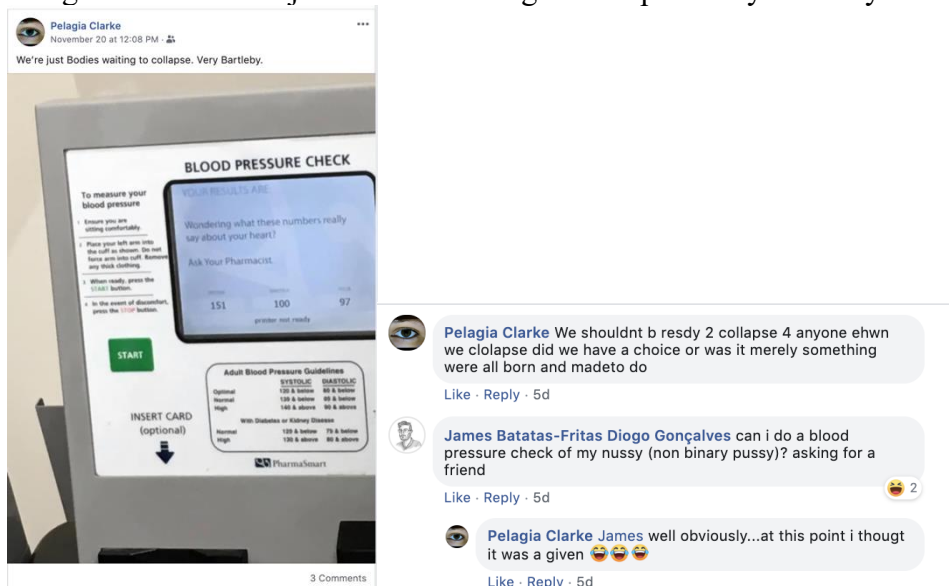
The following comments read as follows:

Pelagia: We shouldnt b resdy 2 collapse 4 anyone ehwn we clolapse did we have a choice or was it merely something were all born and madeto do

James: can i do a blood pressure check of my nussy (non binary pussy)? asking for a friend

Pelagia: (Responding to James) well obviously…at this point I thougt it was a given (followed by three laughing emojis)

Figure 18: a screenshot of a post from Pelagia that reads
"c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m
/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/c/s/x/m/
r we all the same? Does it even matter? WeRe becoming and un/becoming"

The comments read as follows:
Redacted player: you good, Pelagia? Or is the infection setting in?
Pelagia: bdyof sin rebuked, nevER HELTHIER. penitent of the weakening; sisters, brothers, its all becomin g so yellow so yellow, cxsm its al the sam e cxsm csxm bartleby knew bartleby knew
Redacted player: (Responding to Pelagia) Mmmm yeah. That doesnt look healthy
Maris: i think i'm consistently unbecoming.
Pelagia: (Responding to Maris) changeling. Sister in sickness.

Figure 19: a photo Pelagia posted of a person standing in the woods, overexposed and appears to be glowing entirely yellow, hiding their face. The caption on the photo reads "the sun is inside me. my emotions burn holes in my skin, the light peeks through."

Figure 20: Pelagia posted a status that reads "i'm sorry. i think i had anohter moment y esterday im fine niw" with a response from a redacted player that reads "-pats- (sad emoji).

Figure 21: Pelagia posts "stay healthy. stop. They don't feel our pain. stop. stay healthy. stop. can't tell if its a matter of cant or wont, but eregardless- They dont- stay healty. stop. stay healthy. stop. stay healthy RMember that. stop. stay healthy. stop. stay healthy."

Comments read as follows:
Redacted player: oh dear
Second redacted player: ereegardless is not a word.
Pelagia: grmatical mstake.

Figure 22: James shares a status on Pelagia's wall with a yellow background that has emojis with heart eyes. In the status he writes "crazy going…slowly."