Becoming Symptom Notation:

A Study of Choreography for Mad and Hidden Disability Symptomologies

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

The globalized emergence of disability arts and culture has played an integral role in disabled people's activism, community formation, and articulation of disability experiences. As a Mad performance artist working within Chicago's disability arts and culture scene, I've taken notice of an under-representation of disabled artists and dancers who identify as Mad or as having hidden disabilities. The critical recognition of physically integrated dance, which centers people with and without disabilities together, has paved the way for genres of disability dance to consider inclusivity and the aesthetic value of impairments in performance. I imagined how mental and hidden bodily "movements" might be translated into a form of their own, where symptoms from unrecognized disabilities could be projected through the physical body.

Expressed in the style of a "research memoir," this thesis follows the trajectory of developing Symptom Notation, a participatory, 'cripped' system of dance notation that translates symptoms into choreographic gestures through the use of symbols. By exploring a plethora of dance and music notation practices in conjunction with work developed by disabled performance artists, this thesis reflects on Symptom Notation as an artistic practice that prioritizes self-empowerment, creative expression, and community-building. Two of my performance art projects, *Psychosis Journal* (2018) and *unbecoming hiding place* (2019), function as case studies that visualize the motivations, doubts, and experimentations behind Symptom Notation's becomings, in reflection of its shift from a private to communal method of self-exploration. This thesis underscores the growing need to develop self-care practices and collaboration opportunities for people living with hidden disabilities by exploring Symptom Notation's aims to address issues specific to hidden disability experiences, such as the concept of "passing," through the reimagining of symptoms as generative material.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tucked away in one of my journals from a little over two years ago, was a yellow sticky note I had written to myself: *"Please promise to record yourself before you go - for me."* I sat with this note for quite some time, recounting the arduous, initial steps of attempting to self-excavate my experience with madness. Having lived with borderline personality disorder and schizoaffective disorder since adolescence, I have grown accustomed to the emotional instability, memory lapses, and unpredictable highs and lows when feeling symptomatic. In the throes of psychosis or a panic attack, I temporarily lose my grasp on reality, meaning that I have come to distinguish myself in two parts—symptomatic/asymptomatic, self/other—as evident in that written reminder: *me* and *you*. This note from my archive is one of many I have saved over the years in my quest to understand how, as Mad theorist George Procknow describes, "Madness is a fixed ontological condition" that affords "dissimilar" yet "authentic states of knowing and 'Being' in the world" (2018). But the problem of accessing these states in full remained, and I feared that I could never possess complete ownership over my symptomatic mind, which to me, is the most crucial element in recognizing myself as Mad. This epiphany forced me to contemplate: What is it about these altering states of 'Being' that produce knowledge? Can they be harnessed as research and to what end?

I became increasingly aware of time's significance between these states of mind and the frequent use of the terms "going" and "returning" in reference to myself, resulting in an estranged mythology of my own identity. I lacked a complete stable image of myself as a Mad woman, and a framework to reimagine the difficult symptoms of my mental disabilities as fruitful to a creative practice. Most of all, I desired a collaboration with the parts of my madness that I have for so long desperately tried to conceal.

Interested in becoming proactive within this interstitial time/space between self and other, I developed what I now refer to as Symptom Notation, which is an explorative, hands-on approach to engaging with the invisibility of symptoms using multiple forms of creative translation that draw from practices observed in dance and music notations. Symptom Notation is mediated through four layers. The first layer situates the original symptomatic episode, or "happening," as evidence to be recontextualized and manipulated through creative means. Identifying symptoms and how they materialize in the body is crucial. The second layer aims to capture these happenings through drawing and/or video, among other potential methods of documentation. Records act as evidence to the event, which then becomes fodder for translation. The third layer is the activation of documentation through interpretation and/or re-performance. In the case of video, the practitioner may extract specific movements from the original happening to re-perform in a representational context. Alternatively, drawings may be interpreted through the body to represent the essence of a symptom. The last layer then utilizes the translation modes from the third layer to create a new work. Combined into sequences, these symbols produce a choreographed representation of the symptomatic experiences captured on film that enable me to experience the symptoms I could not previously access or witness with my own senses. The resulting dance scores ultimately act as a representation to transgressing the boundary of the symptomatic and asymptomatic mind.

The purpose of this research is to theorize the layers of Symptom Notation as a process-oriented, epistemological method that produces knowledge about madness and hidden disabilities through the mediums of drawing, video, and dance. By contextualizing my artistic practice of self-analysis and reinterpretation in the fields of disability studies, Mad studies, and performance studies, I hope to contribute to the cultural and social reimagination of madness as a

generative identity that has the capability of not only broadening the possibilities of disability dance, but providing multi-modal ways of engaging with hidden disabilities at home and within communal spaces. It is through Symptom Notation that I deepen my efforts to understand the under-represented temporalities of madness and hidden disabilities to bridge the relationship between the physical and incorporeal and build a codified language to translate the "invisible" as visible.

This work draws from writings and performances by various artists and scholars in the fields of disability studies, Mad studies, archive studies, and performance studies to theorize Symptom Notation as an arts-based epistemology. More specifically, I look to the work of Mad and Sick artists to compile the recurring themes people with hidden disabilities seek to address through their artistic choices. I plan to place my work in conversation with the ideas developed in arts and academic spaces to further support Symptom Notation as a cross-disciplinary system of creative research. To do so, I have organized the literature into three sections based on the themes in Symptom Notation's multi-layered process that I intend on analyzing.

A.   **Archive and Interpretation**

The first section of this literature review investigates the function of archival and interpretative methods in identity formation and as supplemental research to performing disability. By linking the theories of disability and performance scholars to the strategies of Mad and Sick artists, I will trace the complex relationship between identity, translation, and archive production to aid in my analysis of representing disability in an artistic context. This section of literature will grant me the opportunity to ground my motivations for developing symptom notation while exposing the tensions between authenticity and representation.

Understanding the relevance of the archive in these becomings is vital. *Psychosis Journal*, which lends its trials and errors to Symptom Notation's early development, focuses on the ways in which symptomatic experiences such as madness can be captured and preserved through documentation and the body. The archive refers to the collection of physical material generated from these processes, such as the journal entries and video recordings in *Psychosis Journal*. The body has the capacity to transmit these materials through methods of interpretation, re-enactment, and re-performance, effectively expanding the chain of archiving from objects to the body. Symptom Notation itself functions as a series of archiving procedures, where the chronicling of symptoms and their representations are carefully organized in the development of choreography. The resulting drawings, symbols, and recorded movements in Symptom Notation work together to develop a visual archive of internal, symptomatic occurrences.

Archive scholar Kathy Michelle Carbone delivers a critical analysis in "Artists and Records: Moving History and Memory" (2016) about the historical engagement artists have long shared working with archives. As artists discover contemporary approaches to activating and repurposing archives, Carbone argues that examining the affective nature and "forces of [archival] materiality" can evoke "corporeal, emotional, and cognitive reactions in those that engage with them… that in turn inform and direct further human agency and action" (3). Carbone considers the role of affect in the temporal and interpretive properties of archives; specifically, how they are utilized as a conceptual strategy for artists "reconsidering historical narratives," (4) interrogating archival omissions, and grappling with time and space. The qualities and "processes of reuse" (14) in archival interpretation generate new meanings that galvanizes artists to reconsider the past in the production of new realities and arts-based interventions for individual and social change. Carbone's focus on the affective nature of

archives clarifies the importance of incorporating drawing and video documentation practices to the effect of gaining agency and understanding from them.

Dancer, choreographer, and academic Rita Marcalo, who is the founder of the UK-based dance company *Instant Dissidence,* was determined to make public her disability for the purpose of research in *Involuntary Dances*. Performed live in 2002, *Involuntary Dances* is a durational work where Marcalo constructed an environment containing several triggers that might have caused her to have an epileptic seizure before an audience. Marcalo vehemently expressed the importance of documentation in this work, as she explains that repeating this performance more than once would prove to be incredibly risky in its unpredictability and possible danger to her health. To capture the performance, Marcalo says she "was wired to cameras which constantly recorded [her] descent into the point of seizure" (2002, 58) while audience members were also invited to record the event using their cell phones. Marcalo states that although a primary motivation for this performance was to gather research for epilepsy studies, she considers the documentation of *Involuntary Dances* (2002) as "a form of self-knowledge" that remedies the "black-spot" she has of her self-image because she "doesn't know herself in that state" (59). Indeed, the archived material collected from *Involuntary Dances* has since been used to generate a series of new performances that extend this relationship Marcalo has with epilepsy and notions of control. Marcalo's awareness of her "black-spot" mirrors the frustrations I have of my symptomatic other, thereby lending a creative method to exploring, or inciting, the unknown.

Another artist tending to this threshold for the sake of archiving symptomologies and exposure is Chicago-based poet and performer, Matt Bodett. Diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, Bodett integrates his writing practice within his performances to navigate madness using a theatrical framework. One such performance that accomplishes the necessity of archived

material to produce a performance is *is : si ng* (2017), which was performed live at Victory Gardens in collaboration with composer, Christophe Preissing. Preissing based his composition on the journal containing Bodett's markings, using them as graphic notation, which is a kind of musical score based on idiosyncratic symbols. As Bodett recites fractured writing documented in his journal during past psychotic episodes upstage right, Preissing performs improvised music downstage. Bodett is simultaneously attempting to induce a psychotic state on stage by exposing himself to surrounding visual and audio stimuli. *is : si ng* (2017) is a durational performance that not only harkens back to Bodett's prior Mad experiences, but plays with the threshold of representation that imposes on audience members to interpret a seemingly private, interior circumstance that is unfolding on the exterior, in public. Both Bodett and Preissing engage in notation practices as they interpret and respond to a pre-existing archive based on Bodett's past symptomatic experience, offering to this work a visual of how this process of translation can be performed.

On the basis of performing disability in theatre, disability studies scholar Carrie Sandahl explores interpretive frameworks as a performance strategy in her reading of disabled artist Lynn Manning's solo performance work "Black Man, Blind Man: Disability Identity Politics and Performance" (2004). Manning makes his interiorly experienced interpretative frameworks apparent to audiences, which allows us to reconcile with the malleability of identity as it traverses through varied contexts of space and time. This trajectory in flux also encourages us to reflect on how identities slip and fall into the next, just as Manning's "interpretative framework as a blind man takes its shape *because* of his experiences as a black man" (588). Sandahl explores Manning's use of interpretative frameworks as a medium in his work *Weights* (2001) to indicate its relevance as not merely a mode of non-chronological storytelling, but one that

through its engagement with overlapping identities and their varying relationship to the world, presents a dialectical framework for interpreting the generative self. Manning's application of interpretive frameworks rejects the generalization of disability as metaphor for otherness, and elevates it further through a close reading of the disabled self in conversation with the realities of "social, economic, and political concerns" (583). Manning shuns the "overcoming" narrative of disability, so often expected by able-bodied/minded audiences, by fragmenting the telling of his life story, where his able and disabled identities blur together, following his unique point of view, but are performed contextually and with subtle differences. The "characters" or states of being that Manning flows in and out of are embodied interpretive frameworks that revisit subjective moments of his own objective knowledge collection. These frameworks will prove useful to understanding the identity layering script strategy in my own project, *unbecoming hiding place.*

Avery Gordon develops a critical language and style that embodies the essence of haunting by way of writing "a history of the present" (195) in her text *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997). As an experimental approach to sociology, Gordon employs the concept of hauntings as a modality that reinterprets the invisible forces of power as shadows that linger in the everyday; forces, that ultimately, meddle in the past, present, and future relationships that conflate "power, knowledge, and experience" (23). To pinpoint the nature of these hauntings, Gordon weaves together testimonies and texts to examine complex relationships in social life, particularly what appears to be missing. The public archives Gordon investigates, which range from the absence of psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein from a photograph to the fate of Argentina's "disappeared" at the hands of state-sponsored terror, all return to this notion of reckoning with ghosts in an urgent manner as a practice of moving forward, in hopes of

eliminating the conditions that first developed the haunting. Gordon's appropriation of hauntings as a framework for analyzing incorporeal forces in archives is useful in thinking about how to treat the relationship between the symptomatic "other" and documentation as evidence, particularly as the unknowns of my Mad other haunt my forming identity throughout this work.

B.   **Time, Dance Notation, and Durational Performance**

The second section of this literature review delves into theories and practices of disability scholars, dance makers, and disabled artists to examine crip temporalities, dance notation, and durational performance. In this section, I centralize the theme of time and how theorists and artists alike have produced movement by considering futurity and preserving dance languages. These works help position Symptom Notation's process as a branch of durational performance where time is key to its evolution.

Argued in his 2020 essay, "You Are My Death: The Shattered Temporalities of Zombie Time," Sick scholar and artist Martin O'Brien returns to his theory of "zombie time," or living past one's presumed life expectancy, to now "interrogate the temporal experience of living during a global pandemic" (para. 4). O'Brien has utilized his lived experience with cystic fibrosis and its binding with time as a framework to make sense of human conditions such as isolation and mortality in much of his written and performance work. However, this essay's approach to analyzing Covid-19 as a specific case study to conceptualize non-disabled people's fear of illness and to heighten awareness of their own mortality offers an opportunity to theorize how assigning certain temporalities to certain circumstances may cultivate new meanings about the human condition, particularly about disability. O'Brien channels his performance work as examples in which "zombie time" is the ruling factor that dictates how and why his work is durational. Additionally, he looks to his own symptom of coughing as a "symbol of hope […] future […]

and change" that "functions as a sick language" and equates them with the perceptions of coughing imbued in the pandemic's presence (para. 2). By bridging sick temporalities like "zombie time" with Covid-19's imposed temporality, O'Brien constructs a relevant conversation where time, the human condition, and durationality exist within and outside an artistic context. While not addressed directly in the chapters, O'Brien's study of his symptoms' meanings and how they connect to larger issues is helpful when thinking about the politics and stigma behind "performing" symptoms, whether representational or not. However, his notion of "zombie time" offers another alternative to identifying temporalities suitable for specific bodies and minds.

One other mode for analyzing the human in isolated increments with a focus on the body rather than behavior, is through dance theorist Rudolf von Laban's analytical movement system Labanotation, which was first published in 1928. Written extensively by dance researcher and protégé of Laban himself, dance scholar Ann Hutchinson Guest, Labanotation is a world-renowned system for recording and analyzing human movement. Similar to that of a musical score, various symbols indicate certain body movements and gestures that together develop a dance score that is fully instructional and preserves the integrity of the original choreography. The manual documentation of such dance scores enables them to withstand time, as they can be reproduced by generations to come so long as the language of Labanotation is comprehensible to the learner. This form of dance notation is akin to visual representations of music for its translation of symbols, which for this project, demonstrates the translation properties of symptoms as their own language to be notated.

Disability and feminist disability studies scholar and activist Alison Kafer describes in her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), a necessary pull towards a reimagined conceptualization of time that upholds the intricate experiences of disabled people and their futurity. Kafer calls for

a "bending of the clock" that contends with "normative expectations of pace and scheduling" (27) in order to recognize time as a flexible condition malleable to individual experiences. By "cripping" time, Kafer undermines hegemonic standards of productivity, surpasses the limitations of accommodations, and insists on a resistance to ableism that accounts for impairments that regularly shift in time and place. Disability scholar Ellen Samuels ruminates on Kafer's theories in "Six Ways of Looking at Crip time" through the lens of her own life, equating crip time to time travel and exploring non-linear life stages. Samuels processes crip time as a venture towards establishing new bodily rhythms and "new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving in the world" (2017). Described as both a liberation and state of isolation, Samuels confronts the authority of compulsory able-bodiedness in their work on crip temporalities to dismantle ableist structures of time. Kafer and Samuels' attention towards time and its affect on disabled bodies and minds suggests that time, even and especially in the context of performance, should be disrupted to the effect of proposing an alternative futurity of access and togetherness. These ideas especially benefit the "utopian" outcome of *unbecoming hiding place.*

C.   **Passing**

The final section of the literature explores the discourse surrounding "passing," performativity, and the dilemma of claiming identity for people with hidden disabilities. The work included here reinforces how Symptom Notation confronts passing as nondisabled as a voluntary and involuntary embodiment. This attention to making the invisible visible as an affective practice in process-oriented performance situates works where "passing" is purposefully subverted through relational aesthetics, such as that of my collaborative performance work. Together, these three themes will evoke the conceptual workings that helped

build Symptom Notation from existing literature and personal experiences to carry forward hidden disability awareness.

Disability studies scholar and performance artist Petra Kuppers writes about the "generative potential of oscillation" (96) in her book *The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art* (2007). According to Kuppers, who is most interested in the discourses produced by contemporary medical performance art, the self and the other are always intertwined, but the self cannot fully fathom the experience of the other. The unknowability of the other, she argues, allows for the creation of "body fantasies" which work to disrupt assumptions and stable knowledges of disabled people. This distinction Kuppers makes about how the self is known versus how one is perceived by the social indicates a dissonant aesthetic that she finds highly productive in the context of performance art. Undoing and reorienting the self until it is enmeshed into the other is an act Kuppers praises for its ability to subvert pre-existing narratives and, in turn, encourage new meanings from disability's ephemeral nature. In my interpretation of Kuppers' work, the interchanging (asymptomatic) self and (symptomatic) other responds to the issue of visibility and documentation that threads throughout.

In "Bodies, Hysteria, Pain: Staging the Invisible," (2005) Kuppers continues to reckon with the complexities that surround visibility and disability disclosure in performance. Reflecting on her work as an artistic director, Kuppers recalls a moment while working on performance research series, *Olimpias*, when some performers shared that they did "not wish to be seen in ways that [would] allow their bodies to be read for "symptoms" (153). In response to this awareness of self and fear of social exclusion, Kuppers considers performance strategies that dislocate the fixation on impairment, disrupting the audience's access to the disabled body. As

Kuppers sways her participants away from "the outer, visual image of their bodies" (157) when making movement, I encourage my collaborators to represent their symptoms, sensations, and emotions (SSEs) through the body. With Symptom Notation, the medical and curious gaze is subverted in the reification of Mad and hidden disability symptomologies, and the representation of impairment commands the space. Kuppers' turn to camouflage impairment in order to avoid the undermining of her performers sits in profound contrast to Symptom Notation's strategy, which suggests various mediated translations of symptomatic experiences can be conveyed as a new experience.

In his chapter "Disability as Masquerade," disability studies scholar Tobin Siebers addresses comparative themes of passing, yet pushes beyond the question of "to pass or not to pass" (2004, 97) to hone in on passing's under-represented situationality: "masquerading." A concept based on racial passing, disability passing in itself is a strategy of managing visibility that disabled people navigate through various contexts to either disclose or conceal their disability from others. Most often observed as a mechanism to appear as able-bodied, Siebers initially focuses on the deliberations involved in passing in the traditional sense to then support his theory of masquerading as "disguising one kind of disability with another or displaying their disability by exaggerating it" (4). This nuanced extension of passing's genesis incites attention to alternative or unconventional formations of disability identity that not only questions performance as "a form of communication," (9) but as "a way to expose false expectations" (11) and assumptions about hidden disabilities. Siebers' evaluation of voluntary versus involuntary decisions of passing reaffirms the complex relationship between disability and visibility that is discussed in both chapters.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity, as explored through the lens of gender in her notable piece *Gender Trouble* (1999), is compelled by the action of doing, rather than of being. She explains in the new preface that "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be the results" (33) in the sense that gender refuses a fixed, stabilized existence and remains processual. In "Performative Acts," Butler tends to an understanding that the repetition of acts that constitute the making of gender ostensibly posits gender as a "project which has cultural survival at its end," (1988, 522) referencing the entanglement of self-making, categories, and power. The construction of gender, as affected by cultural norms and the materiality of the body, emphasizes the significance of behavior on identity formation and the particular ways the performativity of ourselves generate identities to be claimed. Because Butler's theory focuses on "doings" in the information of identity, this source is helpful in contextualizing the specific "doings" in Mad and hidden disability identity formations, and why the structuring of Symptom Notation highlights the importance of self-uncovery through the actions of translation, interpretation, and performance.

In tandem with claiming identity, disability scholar and activist Simi Linton argues for the expansion of disability studies across curriculums to widen the possibilities of disability education. She stresses in *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (1998) a need for reconfiguring current college curricula in conjunction with social and cultural formations to legitimize disability studies as a field of scholarship. Acknowledging the influence of linguistics, Linton conveys that by claiming "disability" as a "marker of identity," (13) disability can be reassigned meaning and reclaimed by members of the disability movement. However, Linton returns to discuss the consequences of territorializing disability in her 2005 article, "What is Disability Studies?", to re-address the issue of who qualifies as disabled, and therefore, who is

permitted to study such literature. She argues that limiting disability studies to only those who publicly identify thwarts "people who do not consider themselves as disabled to find a location on which to comment on the phenomenon of disability" (520). Naturally, this same exclusion ostracizes disabled people who are uncomfortable with disclosing their identity for any number of reasons, and therefore cannot be represented or participate in academic, cultural, or art-based associations with disability (519). Linton's discussion of who can claim disability is influential not only as a motivator to develop further practices and expanded literature useful to people who struggle to procure or maintain disability identity, but as a focus for under-represented communities as well. Part of Symptom Notation's ethos is to center symptoms as identifiers, rather than disability titles or diagnosis, to try and resolve the issue of exclusion Linton identifies.

D.   **Methodology**

As a Mad artist and scholar, I am drawn to autobiographical work for the reason that I can explore my identity in relation to time, space, and the culture in which I inhabit. The specific symptomology I experience through a "borderline schizo" lens informs my positionality as both the researcher and object of research. Using auto/ethnographic approaches, my research documents and analyzes the thought processes, arts-based creative methods, and inquiries involved in the becomings of Symptom Notation as praxis.

I implement multiple creative-based modalities into Symptom Notation's process to engage the physical body with the variability of symptoms and their influence on the senses. Because Symptom Notation relies on the generation of a multi-faceted archive to produce choreography, archival analysis is pertinent to its theorizing. Over the course of 2018 and 2019, I dedicated my time to investigating the function of digital and physical archival methods as

evidence-based proprietors of knowledge production for hidden disabilities. Beginning with the recording phase, I used a camera as an essential tool to expose the symptomatic other. Second, I analyzed my own recorded footage to explain how this difficult exercise serves the gradual formation of the "symptomatic/asymptomatic" duality that are integral to Symptom Notation's purpose. My use of archival analysis became significant to the re-performance and interpretation stages, as the compiling of self-exploratory research worked to render the invisible visible through creative engagement.

Finally, I will perform an auto/ethnographic reflection and analysis on *unbecoming hiding place* (2019) to examine the transference of Symptom Notation as a self-exploratory experiment to its application as a qualitative method for cultivating community within a theatrical framework. Performance artist and scholar Bram Arnold expands the field of ethnography in his explorative compiling of autoethnographic researchers and their studies in "On Autoethnography For Artwork" (2017) to contribute a new form of examining visual arts practices. According to Arnold, autoethnography can be loosely defined as a method that engages a shared aspect of the self within a certain context or community (22). When discussing my experiences in creating *Psychosis Journal* and formulating Symptom Notation's guidelines, I will apply a reflective, autoethnographic approach to analyzing myself as the object of study. For my review of *unbecoming hiding place,* I will shift more towards ethnography while still incorporating my own thoughts. Arnold describes researcher Karl Heider's ethnographic intentions in working with Indonesian school children as an example, explaining "the social group under study [were asked] to consider themselves from their own perspectives" (23) in the context of their own particular culture. Because I was both a facilitator and participant of *unbecoming,* the angle of my analysis will loosely toggle between ethnography and

autoethnography, due to the reasons that I was not only engaging with my own perspectives of passing, but I shared the commonality of passing and its conditions with the perspectives of my collaborators.

E. **Outline of Chapters**

Chapter II, entitled *"*Psychosis Journal: Bridging the Gap Between Madness and the Archival Body," prefaces the development of *Psychosis Journal* as an experimental impulse, with the primary goals to record and analyze the symptoms of my madness. This chapter first situates the importance of archive by discussing its personal significance as a function for self-regulating control and identity, before exploring its relevance to Mad studies, disability studies, and dance. I explain the motivations behind recording and reperforming symptomatic experiences as a method for constructing identity that bridges my interests as a theorist and performance artist. By privileging my personal struggle with claiming madness as an identity, I will express how Symptom Notation as a critical theory project seeks to restore the deficits in scholarship pertaining to hidden disabilities.

Additionally, Chapter II foregrounds music and dance notations, such as Rudolf von Laban's movement system "Labanotation," as fundamental strains of research. I then delve into my discovery of Labanotation and the core fundamentals I "cripped" to generate Symptom Notation as an accessible form of creating choreography, such as personalizing the symbol and movement creation process as opposed to authoring a universal language of dance. The final section of this chapter will position Labanotation's emphasis on a symbolic vocabulary for dance as Symptom Notation's inspiration for translating video recordings and interpreted drawings into movements that effectively utilize the body as a site of inquiry.

Chapter III, entitled "Symptom Notation in '*unbecoming hiding place*': Fostering Community and Collaboration with People with Hidden Disabilities in Performance," explores the process of creating my 2019 MFA thesis from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago performance *unbecoming hiding place,* a collaborative project shared between nine individuals with hidden disabilities in the Chicago area who have varying experiences with performance. *unbecoming hiding place* was the first community-based pilot program for Symptom Notation serving as its methodology. As described in Chapter I, this chapter surveys how the results of the individualized process were translated into guidelines for fostering communal care amongst self-identified disabled people. It summarizes a reflection on the complications that arose in the translation from private to public, the benefits of publicizing a self-reflexive method for identity purposes, and imagining the potentials of Symptom Notation in other disciplines.

F.   **<u>Conclusion</u>**

What first began as a personal research experiment into developing a movement vocabulary representative of madness soon blossomed into a project of cultivating community for participants with hidden disabilities. Symptom Notation is designed to respond to the tensions between nonapparent symptoms and the physical body made clear in the social construction of disability in order to restore agency and empowerment to the user. I realized quickly into the building process of symptom notation that with more translation, the greater the involvement for participants. The multi-step process enabled the user to control the meaning of their disability identity which, for people who live with hidden disabilities, are heavily stigmatized.

In my experience working with Symptom Notation as a participant and facilitator for the last two years, I have learned that it is mutable, possesses therapeutic qualities, and has the ability to elevate how disability scholars and activists understand notions of crip time. Time in

relation to madness, particularly, is convoluted by its extremely episodic nature. The difficulty of working with madness as a collaborator then lies in the struggle of building a language capable of articulating Mad realities; one that can not only physically represent hidden disability symptomologies as we best comprehend them, but produces a set of instructions to repurpose symptomatic experiences without invalidating the daily struggle.

II. PSYCHOSIS JOURNAL: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN MADNESS AND THE ARCHIVAL BODY

A.   **<u>Introduction</u>**

At 1:16PM on February 2nd, 2019, a dear advisor introduced me to a literary device referred to as consecution. Preserved in my sketchbook as "<u>consecution</u> - I go forward by going backward," this statement was coupled with a quickly drawn gesture of a linear scale composed of two circles on opposite ends with lines extending backwards and forward simultaneously. There is something undeniably philosophical and nostalgic about this concept that encourages me to return, as if it were my childhood home, for when the trajectory of my artistic practice and its entangled meanings on my life as a Mad woman risks creative "dead ends." Consecution defines the exchange the past shares with the becoming of the present in its retracing of memories that have built up one's identity. As this project will demonstrate, the process of researching and translating my own archive is the primary method for connecting the loose constellations of my lived experiences as Mad with pertinent issues of self-analysis, visibility, and autonomy. How can writing and performing in the direction of my past recontextualize the present? What can I learn by repeating, interpreting, and performing the thoughts and drawings I have collected over time? In the spirit of consecution, I will first revisit a small, self-authored text, documentation project, and performance, all entitled under *Psychosis Journal,* to preface the becomings of Symptom Notation, which is a system of creating a choreographic movement score based on symptomologies. The thinking behind *Psychosis Journal's* process will situate my quest for resolving the distance between being symptomatic and asymptomatic—one of the primary goals for developing Symptom Notation. This chapter will lay the groundwork for Symptom Notation by ruminating on key concepts such as the archive, the self/the other, re-

performance, and notation, while refashioning Allan Kaprow's movement of Happenings into a hidden disability context.

B. ***Psychosis Journal* as Drawing, September 2017**

I am faced with the rising tensions of miscommunication prevalent in my blurred sense of self and its effect on my intimate relationship. The moments of cognitive absence as a result of temporary symptom overload became a looming presence, and—for my former partner and collaborator, specifically—a problem of shifting responsibilities. I had developed a level of dependence that not only occasionally prompted them[1] to act as a caretaker, but as an archivist to my episodes of panic or psychosis that I could not access or 'see' for myself. The subsequent videotaping of my episodes sought to answer: *What did I say? What did I do? How long was I this symptomatic?* Common questions such as these made plain the detachment I felt between what Roland Barthes describes as the "here-now and there-then," which, in the context of a photograph, demonstrates the "illogical conjunction" between a present object portraying something of the past (1977, 44). When applied to experiencing intense moments of madness, I find myself in the recovering afterlife—the "here-now"—of the symptomatic episode, back in the "there-then". This discrepancy in space and time forced me to rethink how I could bridge my asymptomatic, familiar state of mind with the symptomatic, unfamiliar other to reject the polarity of madness in pursuit of a complete sense of self.

Around that time, I had recently discovered the self-portraiture of British artist Bryan Charnley (1949-1991), who portrayed his experiences with paranoid schizophrenia through painting. While his creative process for articulating his internal experiences were part of a larger scheme of reducing his medication before stopping altogether, I share Charnley's self-

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[1] They/them pronouns.

determination. Bryan had shared with his brother a passion to "paint a full picture of the artist as schizophrene," and that despite the reality of his health deteriorating, he was still able to find ways to communicate his experience by archiving the progression of his psychosis through creative mediums (Bohannan & Charnley). Titled *Self-Portrait Series* (1991), Charnley's paintings dictate his changing perception of self, in which the carefully crafted self-portraits increasingly become abstracted through color, line, and shape. The portraits vary in style as time progresses, and soon the figure is replaced with Surrealist-type imagery of floating lips, fractured eggs, and webs of words and lines.[2] Charnley wrote several addendums to his paintings reflecting on the work's result and described specific hallucinations that he found most compelling in a separate diary. His dedication to archiving the interiorized states of his psychiatric disability remains a prominent and unique source of insight into schizophrenia. Although I am haunted by Charnley's portraits and the tragic consequences of his attempts to unveil schizophrenia, I am also truly in awe of what he accomplished, and I am motivated vicariously through his demands for self-knowledge.

Influenced by Charnley's work, I explored the concept of beginning my own practice of logging symptomatic experiences with the assistance of my partner. The aim of the project, known as *Psychosis Journal*, was twofold; this process would serve to not only dissolve the boundaries between the interiority of the symptomatic event and my ability to comprehend the happening, but it would enable my partner to recognize the type of care needed for different symptoms. I asked my partner to provide the designated sketchbook and a writing utensil to me during a state of elevated symptoms, in an attempt to capture a glimpse of what my mind was

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[2] See Charnley's Self Portrait Series (1991): https://www.bryancharnley.info/self-portraits-2/charnley_self_portrait_series_01/.

experiencing. We hoped that I might be able to illustrate clues about my hallucinations, or at best, inscribe my thought patterns through some legible format. We believed in this process as more than an act of record-making or a solo quest for identity and self-knowledge. In truth, its core purpose was to mend the communication faults of our relationship by inventing a method-based approach to conveying needs in times of crisis. Although there were many, many failures, in that the episodes were in some cases too severe for me to grasp my partner's instruction, *Psychosis Journal'*s first successful entry was November 19th, 2017, followed by December 5th, and so on. I had, by the beginning of March 2018, eleven entries for analysis.

I treated the results of *Psychosis Journal* as a raw collection of found material to be organized and recontextualized. It was as if I were looking through a catalogue of Cy Twombly's expressionist paintings, and I embraced the sense of embodying Twombly's role as a cryptographer in World War II.[3] Throughout *Psychosis Journal's* entries, a mixture of thick and thin lines saturated the pages, often ending in circular motions that developed into pools of black ink. Moments where my hand appeared to have abruptly stopped left a running ink spot before once again engaging in frenetic gestures across the page. There were indications that I attempted to write, but the pace of my hand left most of these words scribbled and entirely illegible. An image of a misshapen door with trembling lines rumbling towards the doorknob was visible in one entry. Collectively, the journal reflected key characteristics about my symptomatic experiences that were translated into recurring aesthetics and patterns; for example, there was a dichotomy between fast and slow pace, moments of pause dispersed between sections of

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[3] Cy Twombly (1928-2011) was an American painter and sculptor working in the Abstract Expressionist movement. During World War II in the 1950s, Twombly was stationed in the army's cryptography department. It is believed that the coordinates, ciphers, and signals that appear in his work are derived from his experience as a cryptographer. See Twombly's work: http://www.cytwombly.org/artworks.

scribbles, and an attention towards covering a majority of the page. How do I reify what I'm seeing? Are there makings of a language here?

Figure 1. Entry from the *Psychosis Journal* text. Dated: 12/15/17.

C.   ***Psychosis Journal* as Moving, March 2018**

With my experiences as a performer and a painter being intrinsically linked, I conceptualized the function of my hand and its relationship to the page as the mechanism in which I could transmit my interior life. I considered ways of reinterpreting the drawings into

movements, and what it might mean to "choreograph" the aesthetics and visual patterns I observed in the entries through a performative framework. William Forsythe, a pioneering dance artist exploring the thinking and longevity of choreography, describes of his focus on re-performance or the significance of material objects' ability to "generate autonomous expressions" of dance and choreographic compositions" (Haviland 2013; para. 1). Forsythe argues that "choreographic objects," which he defines as "organizing tools," not only have the capacity to compartmentalize the "organizing principles" of a dance, but prolong the dance's life beyond the performance. Crucial to his practice, Forsythe is "deeply involved […] with the re-substantiation of what he identifies is the 'trace' of the work in the world," (ibid) elevating the importance of the object or event in developing choreography. As sort of a parallel to envisioning the fertility of *Psychosis Journal's* content, the entries leave a "trace" of the symptomatic happening, and in the lines, scribbles, and obscured imagery was perhaps a vocabulary for reconstructing cerebral energy through the body. *Psychosis Journal* is itself a "choreographic object" independent of the original happening that embodies what I would come to understand as a graphic form of notation.

Forsythe's concentration on the autonomous and fruitful lives of objects spoke volumes. It became clear that I shared a primal relationship to this journal archive, and that I valued it as more than an experimental record but as supplemental research. Instinctively, as if I knew anything about dance notation at that time (I did not!), I imagined each page through the lens of a grid. I recalled the process of creating scale drawings in my undergraduate studies, where the grid method was helpful in scaling an image smaller or larger by way of copying exactly what was in each square. Moreover, I was inclined to read each square from left to right, as if it were sheet music, and I were to perform a musical score. Using these approaches, I sketched a grid on

a sheet of transparency and laid it across the first entry. Suddenly I sensed that this process of compartmentalizing frenetic drawings into small, legible squares was a way to isolate the miniscule details often lost in the intensity of the image. The "containers," as I referred to them, also provided me a method of organization to digest these works in sections.

I had little experience on how to develop choreography from drawings, and I felt that the only way to interpret the containers was intuitively. With respect to the automatic and unconscious method in which these drawings were made, I concluded that the most appropriate way to represent the mental happenings in dance would be through a combined recognition of each drawing's over-arching tone in collaboration with the mark-making according to each container. If the drawing were especially chaotic, the interpretation of each container's movement would have greater intensity and heightened emotion. The duration of the dance relied solely on the moment I completed the entire score; time had little bearing. Because the entries shared the same scale throughout, most of the dances ended around five minutes, although this too depended on the amount of marks across the page.

The movements themselves were primarily established through the directionality and formation of the mark-making. Lines that were jagged and drawn rapidly from left to right would be emulated using the entire body. My decision-making for the movements and whether they would utilize only my arms, legs, torso, or the whole body at once, was loose and had no particular instructions. Working with the results of *Psychosis Journal* was playful and for some time had minimal boundaries or expectations to how the dance should be constructed or performed. I witnessed, for the first time, that I possessed a level of authority over my disabling experiences, and that the time spent re-performing the drawings instilled a confidence in me that was lost. I could begin to see the "generative potential of oscillation," in accessing the self and

the other (96), that Petra Kuppers discusses in her work, *The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art* (2007). The process of collecting, generating, and performing *Psychosis Journal* was an act of transgressing the boundaries of the familiar self and the other. The symptomatic and asymptomatic mental states rely on each other to produce the sequence, and by "drawing into the self," the understanding of my otherness expands. Kuppers recognizes the value between these unstable modes of being, emphasizing this relationship in the purview of the "scar" that "mediates between the outside and the inside" (2) of self. Kuppers' theory of the scar as a site of meaning-making, capable of "knitting difference into identity" (18) through its oscillation of self and other, thus welcomes "the unknown [to] emerge not as a site of negativity but as the launch pad of new explorations" (94). Perhaps *Psychosis Journal* is like the scar Kuppers seeks to contextualize in disability performance as the "productive and liminal space" which divides the familiar and unfamiliar mental states. In his review of Kuppers' book, performance scholar Nathan Stucky describes these states as being where "the self cannot [fully] know the lived experience of the other [...] that there is always a gap or residue that remains between what can be known by the spectator and what the experience is of the interior self of the performer" (Stucky 2007). In a way, I fulfill both the roles of a spectator and "performer" of the happening where knowledge-making begins but remains fragmented and removed.

I think what is most pertinent about the making process of *Psychosis Journal* in comparison to its physical product is that I still remain so distant from my symptomatic self. Like Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), I felt that I too developed the beginnings of a critical language capable of manifesting ghosts. Gordon proposes hauntings as a method of knowing and examines phenomena that are present by their absence, such as power relations. Gordon confronts binaries of visible/invisible and

presence/absence, and in doing so, she argues that "ghostly matters" are signifiers of missing entities that reckon with the paradoxical nature of forces "which make [their] mark by being there and not here at the same time" (6). *Psychosis Journal's* dual presence and absence simultaneously manifests the past, present, and future of my lived experiences with madness. As a complex archive that instills power, autonomy, and self-knowledge, *Psychosis Journal*'s attempts of making contact with the unfamiliar strives to answer a lingering question of Gordon's: "How then can our critical language display a reflexive concern not only with the objects of our investigations but also with the ones who investigate?" (24).

D.   **Difficulties and Vulnerabilities in *Psychosis Journal*, March 2018**

The efforts to investigate, or uncover a foreign mode of self, feels quite anthropological. As if to reveal that those who haunt are also haunted, I harken back to Bryan Charnley's exploration of the self and the perilous steps he traversed to provoke the other. I worried of my own insatiable desire to also reach the other, and how dissatisfied I eventually became of *Psychosis Journal*'s distance to that precarious territory of madness. Yet, I was incentivized by the progress I had made in that direction, despite the discomfort that arose in the fear and anxieties I sensed by going further. I reflected on the many emotions I experienced in engaging with the vulnerability and intimacy of my archive, and how, even as a performance artist and spectator exposed to the most obscene, intense, and gory live performances and images, I share in art critic Jennifer Doyle's thoughts that "I seem to have a lower tolerance for more ordinary forms of relational intimacy, for the things that 'feel' like life and therefore cut too close," (4) particularly when they are extensions of myself in a state of crisis. I was grappling with the next steps for *Psychosis Journal* after the journal was complete and interpreted in personal movement

studies*,* assuming that the work would eventually be performed for an audience, although I feared sharing something so raw and vulnerable.

In *Hold it Against Me (2013),* art critic Jennifer Doyle explores difficulty and vulnerability in works of contemporary art. Using what she identifies as a "soft approach" (xviii), Doyle weaves within her critiques her own autobiographical challenges and deployments of vulnerability as she searches for a critical language to evoke the affective and emotional complexities of describing works of art she deems difficult. She begins by unveiling the complexity laden in her own response to Adrian Howells' intimate performance *Held* (2007), in which she decides to miss her appointment for the event. Howells' performance of "accelerated intimacy"—as he defines it—walks through various stages of interaction between the artist and spectators, beginning with a casual, seated chat to eventually "lying down together, spooning" (2). Doyle admits to the discomfort in not knowing how she would react to the performance or if the artificiality of the performance's staged environment of intimacy would affect her deeply. In reckoning with difficulty and vulnerability as a spectator, problematized by her responsibilities as an art critic, Doyle's strategy of recalling experiences that stay with her long after they have ended reinforces the persistent difficulty she attempts to articulate not only in the works she curates, but in her approach to analytical writing. I argue that perceiving intimate work through frameworks of difficulty and vulnerability provides additional lenses to understanding the fundamentals of *Psychosis Journal*, especially as it concerns the positionality of the spectator, but equally in my perception of the work.

By using vulnerability as a medium when performing Mad lived experience, questions of performing sensitive material and the types of feelings that may linger afterwards arose: What makes viewing a performance about psychosis difficult? What do spectators expect or seek to

gain from this kind of performance work? One can speculate that the stigmas and inherently intimate experiences of living with psychotic symptoms attracts spectators to its unknown nature. As Doyle struggled and ultimately regretted missing Adrian Howells' performance of intimacy, perhaps spectators might determine that my work on psychosis was destined to be difficult because borderline personality disorder (BPD) and schizophrenia among all other mental disabilities are complicated, homogenized, and scrutinized as a result of medical and cultural perspectives. The subjectivity of the spectator in a work like *Psychosis Journal* reinforces the concepts that both Gordon and Doyle wrestle with, in that the shared vulnerability between the expression of myself and the viewers establishes a fickle power relation that is entrenched in the forces that compel and reject Mad exposure. The persistence of difficulty that Doyle discusses in her review of emotionally charged performances leads me to find connections to the convoluted affectiveness of *Psychosis Journal* as an artifact of the symptomatic "happening."

E. **Symptomatic "happenings"**

The reframing of madness as what I am calling (lower-case) "happenings" draws from a rich arts movement invested in chance. Much of the literature that surrounds the rise of Happenings in the early 1960s and the form's subsequent surge of archival practices considers the use of documentation as "a 'literal' means of communicating diverse realities" (Berger & Santone 2016). Happenings—which is a term I have been carefully reinscribing in a lower-case fashion for my symptomatic episodes—embraced a radical approach to configuring time and space in the realm of performance art that playfully problematized the effectiveness of documentation. According to the artist Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), who infamously recited in his 1966 speech "How to Make a Happening," Happenings are performances, situations, and events that occur in the world, and although they are organized to an extent, "times and places are not

coordinated," and they purposefully reject all standard art forms. Happenings were intended to question what constitutes art versus life, and intentionally exacerbate that uncertainty by conflating the two. The drive of Happenings are in "real time," (2009, 2) willfully excluding any attempt at rehearsal as they are declared impossible to be repeated in exactness. The types of documentation that exists of Happenings are typically black and white photographs and manually scribed scores or notes that upon reflection contain the same properties William Forsythe argues are in "choreographic objects." I'm interested in the ambiguous properties of Happenings, and how within all of these loose guidelines, the question of performance documentation as necessary proof of their existence might shed light on the quandaries of performing hidden disabilities. I will return to the discourses surrounding s documentation and live performance later on in this project, as these thoughts are formative to the transition from *Psychosis Journal* to Symptom Notation.

The overwhelming symptomatic experience, or "happening" as I will alternate between the two terms, that temporarily skews your balance, grasp, or consciousness of reality, which could develop from a panic attack, disassociation, psychosis, seizures, or fainting from low blood sugar, are real-life situations that may be anticipated but often unexpectedly arrive. They are incidents that can threaten to afflict anyone, are physically involved, and can "happen" anywhere, anytime, with or without the presence of others. If I am to intertwine my lived experiences, and thus my performativities, as a Mad woman with my training in performance art, then it is necessary that I link how I archive and re-perform the raw moments of my episodes to interpret and re-evaluate their meaning through calculated artistic choices and interventions. I am not arguing that my symptomatic experiences emulate the qualifications and contextual knowledge that is Kaprow's Happenings and its movement. What I am pointing to, however, are

the parallels between these forms of performance that offers a framework to understanding how I conceive my "happenings" as authentic material that regards no standards, formal considerations, and are not typically shown to an audience, before being repurposed to generate inauthentic, mediated performances in theatrical environments. Symptomatic happenings suspend a loose analogy to Kaprow's Happenings through the anticipation of the event and the potential for witnesses. I relate the anticipation of a symptomatic episode, like a panic attack, to the scheduling of an art Happening; at some point, something will happen, and someone other than the performer might witness it too. In my life, happenings are not formally scheduled, but I do expect their arrival at any given time.

  Before I move on from *Psychosis Journal's* beginnings, my brief survey on happenings, and the role documentation practices play in this theorizing, I feel that I should summarize the core influences, motivations, difficulties, and self-determination that were integral to the experimental process that led me into the makings of Symptom Notation. The result of this dive into the self, and in confronting the distant, unfamiliar part of my Mad identity, was a necessary act of forging self-awareness and connections to those closest to me. As proud as I may be in reclaiming Mad and expressing my identity with confidence through my art and scholarship, I insist on not shying away from the reality of living with mental disabilities. I constantly struggle with maintaining a whole sense of self on a daily basis. My interpersonal relationships regularly fluctuate as an effect of my sensitive temperament. The anxieties I have about sustaining productivity, trust, and recognition in a world that is largely inaccessible and misinformed about disabilities, particularly of those that are nonapparent, is a fact that lingers in my consciousness and informs the motivations involved in creating an artistic practice that forefronts these prominent concerns. While *Psychosis Journal* was initially an experiment that I could not foresee

would promise any significant relief or new self-knowledges, I discovered that the fundamentals of its process－of what worked in contrast to the elements that could improve－were seeds for a structured practice with a solidified set of guidelines that respects the unknowability of living with madness amongst other hidden disabilities. At this point, I deemed it important to my growth to step back from the fragmented, written record and examine the performances of neurodivergent artists engaging in difficult practices involving archives, sensitive stimuli, and the role of the witness.

F.   **Archiving Mental States in Disability Art**

I sought the opportunity to become what art historian Dora Apel (2002) refers to as a "secondary witness" to myself in the midst of a symptomatic happening. With the camera as a potential accomplice, I could expose the psychophysical unfurlings that enforce my own self-dissonance. Such a visual archive would deliver a testimony that hides nothing, and I recognized the emotional risks involved in bearing witness to myself during an unfamiliar state. Archivist and dancer Kathy Michelle Carbone (2006) examines artists' archival endeavors, focusing closely on the affective qualities of archives and how they evoke "corporeal, emotional, and cognitive reactions in those that engage with them […] that in turn inform and direct further human agency and action" (3). In this emerging field of research, Carbone argues that the reuse, reorientation, and compiling of archives to produce new meanings can activate memory and "shape feelings and understandings about past human activity and experiences" (13). Such an example of this use of archives would be the work of Matt Bodett, a Mad-identifying, Chicago-based performance artist and poet. A dear friend of mine, I have had the privilege to witness Bodett perform on multiple occasions, in which my introduction to his lived experience with

schizoaffective disorder in *is : si ng* (2017) would cement the unspoken connectedness of our bond.

Performed live at Victory Gardens in collaboration with composer, Christophe Preissing, *is : si ng* integrates an archive of fractured and seemingly incoherent poetry written by Bodett during previous psychotic episodes. Bodett is dressed casually when he enters the stage and approaches a small, school-like desk in the center, lit by a single lamp. It's evident that paper and a writing utensil are on the desk. As Bodett begins to recite the syllables and incomplete words of his writing, Preissing gradually develops an over-stimulating sound piece that engulfs the theatrical space, enveloping Bodett's susceptibility to stimuli inside. I witnessed the all-too-familiar loosening of the familiar mind as Bodett slipped into a psychotic elsewhere, still managing to pronounce, and effectively exorcise, the archive of his past within the present. In deliberately constructing the conditions that often lead to his mental departures, Bodett tactfully utilized his written archive as a processual interstice between his states of mind. His initial, asymptomatic reading of broken words composed from prior symptomatic happenings now embodied the affect in which they were first conceived. I found myself pulled into the gravity of the performance, hallucinating with Bodett from across the theater, and attempting to stay present within my own bodymind, just as he attempted to do so through the difficult task of pronouncing letters, syllables, and words.

Bodett's performance presented a Mad reality to a live audience, precariously navigating the fine lines of control and artifice performance art tentatively depends on. His archive functioned as a ghost—a critical language—that metaphorically possessed a performative space to conduct its haunting. The artist and academic Rita Marcalo, who investigates the "black-spots" of her lived experiences with seizures, tests the limits of her disability with a similar

recipe of chance. As an epileptic, the development of Marcalo's choreography and performance art depends on the chance that she might record her own seizures as an act of radical exposure. Marcalo responds to the conundrum of hiding her epilepsy with the transparency of her performative practice, centering the main objective of performances like *Involuntary Dances* (2009) around notions of control. *Involuntary Dances* was Marcalo's formal attempt to induce a seizure by exposing herself to triggering stimuli in front of a live audience at Bradford Playhouse theatre, located in England. As an act of consciousness-raising for the audience and for herself, Marcalo intended the risky, voyeuristic gesture as a paradoxical response, or potentially an answer, to the invisibility of epilepsy. In coming across the work of Marcalo, these reasonings resonated with me. She writes, "I may not be able to control what happens during an epileptic seizure, but this work was an attempt to take control of the conditions within which an epileptic seizure happens," (58) echoing the challenges I've faced in exploring the meaning of my madness. The attempted luring of an epileptic seizure for a live audience and their recording mobile devices－which, after a span of 24 hours proved to be unsuccessful in that particular live iteration (Gotman 2012)－was an experiment of revealing, assumed "failure" by some, and yet, a major contribution to the politics of performing disability through her determination to incite an unfiltered glimpse into an epileptic's reality, despite the inherent dangers.

Bodett and Marcalo share the intent to draw out their symptoms in a contrived environment with the support of archival material stemming from previous experiences and processes of video documentation to generate new meanings, archives, and awareness. Both artists demonstrated clear intentions to use either past works or present measures of documentation to cultivate future understandings about themselves, for themselves, but also for outsider recognition. Both artists offer a unique framework to performing hidden disability that

hinges on processes of control onto the unexpected. Whether or not the symptomatic happening actually arrives, the invitation to document the mysterious and anomalous territories of neurodiverse minds to a camera or a stranger goes against the very code of denial people who willfully "pass" as non-disabled strive to maintain.

I planned to broach the next phase of my archival endeavors with these influences to add substance to the motives behind temporarily trading a manual method of recording symptoms (*Psychosis Journal's* book) for video documentation of the happenings themselves. Witnessing vulnerable works such as Bodett's and Marcalo's invigorated me to challenge my fears of seeing the unfiltered assault of madness on my mind and body. I expected to encounter my frantic image as someone different than how I experience myself. I believed that I might embody a range of curiosity and discomfort, such like the spectatorship Marcalo received, in viewing myself in an unfamiliar form. Yet, I was hopeful of the generative possibilities of encountering my other, and what the traces of these happenings could provide to my work.

Archives, and the practice of archiving, has since childhood held great significance on the ways in which I construct and keep hold of my identity. I have kept the notes I passed to my elementary schoolmates. I have saved years of medical documents, hospital bracelets, receipts, jewelry, locks of hair, objects of nature, and every card received since the age of seven. I am the keeper of maybe 85% of my immediate family's photographs. The impulse that drives me to archive is innate, sentimental, and in most instances informal. It is this same impulse that guides my artistry and scholarship.

G.   ***Psychosis Journal* on Camera, April 2018**

I can recall the successes and failures in trying to capture myself on camera. Moments of desperately fidgeting with the camera's mechanics, finding the power button, adjusting the lens,

the angle, the tripod—with some attempts more lucid to my memory than others. I remember being visibly distraught at my or my partner's inability to document for any number of reasons, brought on perhaps by a faulty memory card or the blunt reality that my episodes would become so severe that managing a video camera was realistically the least of anyone's problems. Recording myself experiencing a symptomatic overload consumed my life for months, and the need to observe madness clung to my consciousness like a terror, nothing short of an obsession. After countless missteps, I loosened my grip on the duration of this experiment, settling for the five or six recordings I had captured so far. I decided to review this material privately, unsure of what to expect of my own reactions but certain that whatever might be on this footage would never meet the eyes of anyone besides my own.

An indescribable pressure rolled up my spine. Immediately I became a stranger and a "secondary witness" to a writhing, aching, convulsing being in distress, to what I imagined could best be understood as disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concept of staring at ourselves: "that image that we see is at once familiar and strange, *the me and the not-me*" (53). In her revolutionary work *Staring: How We Look* (2009), Garland-Thomson analyzes the cultural, personal, and political implications of the gaze. Using her own taxonomy of staring, Garland-Thomson digs deep into the social phenomenon of staring as a form of knowledge production, honing in on the instincts that provoke our primal "insistence [to] see things with our own eyes" (47). The notion of staring at ourselves is what Garland-Thomson explains as curiosity redirected inward. Fundamental to the human condition and how we learn, staring at ourselves brings up associations with narcissism and trickery, becoming even more complex with the mediation of devices that reflect us. Mirrors, photographs, videos, and other means of experiencing our reflection complicate our sense of selves by demonstrating how we are

perceived. Through a repeated observation of our reflection, we become familiar with ourselves. This epistemology, or method of producing knowledge, happens as a result of staring.

If staring is "a search for knowledge where we look at unfamiliar objects long and keen enough to resolve their mystery,"[4] then at last I could know the deviance of my brain. I tried to absorb the knowledge this footage gifted me without dismissing the anguish and shame that I felt. For my partner, these happenings were normal as a result of their frequency; for me, I was on the outside looking in. I replayed the unraveling of my madness, unapologetically gawking at the disastrous impact these symptoms wrecked on mind, body, and environment. The rewards and dangers that arrived in my self-scrutiny and deliberate (although personal) exploitation for the sake of knowing were clear, as my prolonged visual "expedition into unknown territory" (Garland-Thomson 49) jostled the worldview I constructed to reconcile and perceive value from madness. My eyes engorged on the extreme display of vulnerability, dependency, and emotional tumult of my collapse, followed by the required care necessary to restore me to a state of calm. The "psychological dread" incited by "an unsettling awareness of our embodiment," (58) which Garland-Thomson writes in regards to staring at unusual bodies, forces us to be mindful about our mortality and susceptibility to illness. In my case, the Mad brain and body on the camera disturbed my self-awareness, reminding me of the fragility of living with borderline personality disorder and the unpredictability of psychosis.

I am intensely protective of these raw glimpses, and I maintain that they will never be shared with the public. Bearing emotional difficulty has its limits and "we rarely know these limits until we encounter them" (Doyle 1). I conceded that the risky approaches I admire in Bodett and Marcalo's practices were－for me－not sustainable methods of presenting disability.

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[4] See Vehmas, 322.

Alternatively, I speculated on the qualities that video and photographic documentation enforces. The degree of emotion spilling out of the footage was so palpable that there was relief, even comfort, in the temporal distance that separated my spectatorship from the live event. Art historian and critic Amelia Jones (1997) also favors documentation's ability to achieve this, arguing that viewers might "find it difficult to comprehend the histories/narratives/processes [they are] experiencing until later, when [they] too can look back and evaluate them in hindsight" (12). The fact that an intermediary—a document, or reperformance perhaps—could emulate a similar experience as live performance filled me with optimism. I hoped to maintain the integrity of these videos and bring their affective presence back to the work as supplemental material, to aid in my efforts of building a practice respectful of my limits but equally informative of madness.

One way of repurposing the footage would be through strategies of re-performance. By redefining the footage as records of "happenings," as opposed to contributing them to sanist ideologies of Mad surveillance, it would perceive the artistic value of my symptomatic experiences without directly exposing my raging bodymind to a live audience. The intentions guiding the shift towards capturing the raw footage was not a commentary that supports mentally ill people's objectification or surveillance. The process was meant for my own self-reckoning, and that I could draw from the footage as yet another bank of found material, and isolate individual movements in which choreography could be developed from. New questions were emerging as I reached this point: What would it mean to reinscribe movements that occur in mental crisis as a dance vocabulary? Would re-enacting movements from video records not available to the public still communicate the raw energy consistent with Mad happenings? What

types of new meanings are produced through the mediation of this process? And above all, what can forms of notation offer madness?

H.　　　**Notation Considerations, May 2018**

A practical, widely used approach to preserving original works for future reproductions is through the concept of notation. Artists, musicians, and dancers are among many creatives working from and creating their own forms of notation as instructions to re-performing original pieces of art. Whereas traditional notation typically involves a determined set of values between the symbol and movement or sound, experimentalists like American avant-garde composer, John Cage (1912-1992), were keen on disrupting the roles of the composer and performer with their graphic notation systems. Music theorist Judith Lochhead explains that Cage championed "indeterminacy," which maintains that "the composer 'determines' a set of rules by which a performer may produce notational symbols which regulate sound production" through several layers of interpretation posed by the performer (234). This means that chance replaces the set relationship of a symbol and its output, allowing the interpreter free reign in a work's reconfiguration under a few simple instructions. Therefore, the "scores of indeterminate works and the sounds they generate" (ibid) are undefined, and arguably, escapes the accuracy of reproduction that conventional notation systems purposefully attempt to preserve. According to art critic Robert C. Morgan, even Allan Kaprow, who initially claimed in 1961 that once a Happening occurs, "then they are gone forever", reassessed the pitfalls of avoiding re-performance and future interpretations of Happenings as he grew more concerned with the "impermanence" of his work (7). The minimal documentation from his improvisational Happenings of the 1950s led Kaprow once a pupil of Cage, to invest in notational strategies for

future works. But what does notation, or an abstracted remodeling of its form and use, have to offer my work?

What most excites me about engaging with the notational developments of well-known mid-20th century artists like Cage or Kaprow are the graphic and textual traces they left behind for further interpretation. Graphic notation uses various shapes and undulating patterns that are typically non consistent and abstract as indicators for sound. The deviance from strict notational scores into the realms of improvisation, aesthetics, and performance introduced newer, more accessible ways of reconceptualizing sound and movement (Gutkin 2013). With the *Psychosis Journal* entries and the footage, I had two pieces to a whole project, and although they are exclusive of one another in origin, I could now envision the responsive mark-making as notated scores for symptomatic happenings. The few instructions to *Psychosis Journal* were simple, and I had already played with the concept of "reading" my drawings as traces to physical and mental movement. Now with the footage, I could mentally isolate sections of the drawings and imagine the wailing body on the recording mirror its shape. I realized that a connection formed between the *Psychosis Journal* archive and the video documentation that suggested there was a missing, intermediate process or a tool capable of systematizing happenings. Maybe that's exactly what has been lost - a physical object or hands-on process that I could see, touch and organize. There is irony in building a system that compartmentalizes madness as a means of control - only now it's an autonomous matter of obtaining self-knowledge and empowerment.

Although stimulated by the flexivity and ample room for interpretation fundamental to Cage and Kaprow's notational approaches, the lack of a consistent structure felt contrary to the issues I was facing in regards to documenting madness. The psychiatrist and philosopher Mohammed Abouelleil Rashed (2019), who is interested in the intersections of Mad culture,

identity, and activism, writes of madness as a sophisticated embodiment containing special properties of "heightened sensory awareness, visions and voices, and the ability to perceive complexity and significance in everyday experiences" (151). However, situating madness as a positive identity and valuable culture is not without criticism, particularly as people with mental illness remain vulnerable to medical model ideologies and treatments. Rashed makes clear that Mad pride is a complicated stance in the interwoven history of mental illness, disability, and impairment (152). Adjacent to my own pride is the sensibility that madness is stubborn, difficult to predict, and can have damaging effects on my self-image and relationships. In reflecting on the last year of formulating a concrete method to understanding madness, I can't reasonably work with a purely indeterminate style. Interpretation is important, but a fixed set of guidelines to which madness can be explored would benefit the accessibility of the process while enabling a sense of order. I found it necessary to move away from an idiosyncratic graphic form of notation towards an organized system with set values and perimeters.

My search for a movement-oriented notation system focused on structure and re-performing written or drawn materials directed me towards dance theory and languages of dance. There I discovered multiple systems of recording choreography, though one system known as Labanotation, caught my attention. At that time, I was recording isolated movements from the raw footage into a Google drive folder, unsure of what the next steps might be. The re-performed movements, typically 5-8 seconds in length, isolated patterns in the footage I collected of my symptomatic happenings, though once recorded, I felt that the future of their interpretation was futile. It seemed that the re-performed movements evaded further involvement, and were simple reproductions from a more grueling practice of trying to capture raging madness. Labanotation offered an approach with a foundation, or a regulated language of symbols, that could create

variations of a single idea. I wondered whether symbols, as indicators of determined movements, could re-perform the symptomatic happenings on the footage? Can performances develop from symbols that could independently represent happenings without the cumbersome process of actually recording them? Perhaps an epistemology was meant to be uncovered between the Mad mind, body, and the sign.

I.   **Symptom Notation's Beginnings, June 2018**

Fascinated, I spent months learning the language of Labanotation. One of Laban's protégés, Ann Hutchinson Guest (1954), condensed Laban's research into a cohesive guide of the system's history and operations. Also known as "Kinetography Laban", Labanotation is a pioneering dance notation system of recording and analyzing human movement that its creator, choreographer and dance theorist Rudolf van Laban, understood as a "written dance" (Hutchinson Guest 3). Published in 1928, Labanotation expanded upon centuries of movement notation studies and experiments and concentrated on developing a literature in which movement works could be preserved step-by-step for historical analysis and reconstruction. Labanotation functions as a language comprised of a singular symbol structure that once learned, details with great accuracy the spatial dimensions, body-parts, actions, and type of movement to a choreographed piece. Considerations of "weight, space, flow, time, and energy" (Barbacci 6) are fundamental to Labanotation, as the abilty to precisely record the direction, intensity, and duration of a movement is essential and, historically, has been lost in prior notation system approaches. The symbol used in Labanotation, not unlike a music note in representation, imitates the figure of a person through its rectangular, vertical axis. Laban, like other admirers of notation systems, prized symbols as indicators of meaning and of language, and he recognized the difficulty of establishing a singular symbol capable of articulating the nuances of choreography.

To account for changes in movement, the basic symbol, also referred to as a "staff", is modified through shading, changes in shape, length, and line positionality (Hutchinson Guest). Individual movements are translated into symbols that are then grouped into a score. In the style of sheet music, the score can be interpreted, analyzed, and reperformed, but to a greater depth and complexity.

Laban focused on refining the plethora of contributions previous dance notators explored in their work, "from word abbreviations to track drawings, to stick figures (visual systems), to modified music notes and now, finally to use of abstract symbols", (Hutchinson Guest 102) to reach a sustainable, universal system of notation. Hutchinson Guest suggests that Labanotation should be the last of this progression of changes, insinuating that this system's language is timeless, which from dance and science theorist Silvana Barbacci's perspective, "fulfilled [Laban's] dream of making dance reproducible and therefore independent from single performances, thus preventing the loss of choreographic masterpieces" (5). Indeed, this system has proven its archival capacities for decades, but should the competency of its language remain only to those who read it? In the months I dedicated to attempting to learn and perform Labanotation-based exercises in my home, I was faced with the difficulty of understanding its language. I do not come from a background in dance or notation; the genre of performance art I'm most familiar with embraces conceptual extremes and the unpolished body over traditional technique. Still, my ability to comprehend the meanings of each variation of symbol and accurately translate them through my body was a challenge. The process felt exclusive, as if it were necessary for me to be situated in a certain context, having already possessed certain knowledges, in order to perform.

Structural advantages, however, exist in this system, which with some tweaking and reframing, could transform Labanotation into a viable tool of knowledge production for madness and hidden disability. I immediately gravitated to the signs and symbols of Laban's movement vocabulary. The understanding that these signs carried specific meanings and instructions underscored the importance of knowing and having access to this language. But what if the practitioner already contains the knowledge needed for a language of signs without realizing it? What would it mean to simplify a universal dance language by encouraging each practitioner to individually develop a vocabulary based on their symptoms, sensations, and emotions? Learning of one's symptoms, as I have come to know them, is inevitable in not only the course of medical treatment, but throughout our social lives. Whether we are experiencing a common cold or a condition related to our impairments, symptoms are often projected as the dominant language to which people discuss what is affecting them. Like most Mad and disabled people, I have struggled with psychiatrists and doctors to locate concrete diagnoses through the basis of symptoms, although one thing remains clear: Symptoms come across as a language for disability and illness, and it is through my own sharing of symptoms that I and my psychiatrist have identified, that I am able to form connections with others who may possess similar mental and bodily experiences. It is my belief that we tend to know our minds and bodies on a deeper, intimate and remarkably sentimental level than any medical intervention could provide. How would reclaiming symptoms as hallmarks of identity promote self-empowerment and connections with others, particularly through the use of the body? This question, which beckoned a collaborative element to this developing system, refocused my efforts towards establishing a system of disability dance that draws from the semantics and basic principles of Labanotation,

while heralding the "indeterminacy" ethos of the improvisation and chance-based work of Cage and Kaprow.

J.   **Symptom Notation Guidelines, September 2018**

The following five steps are the basic principles of Symptom Notation's design. Symptom Notation has reworked processes integral to Labanotation to include substantial flexibility and interpretation from the user. I prepared these instructions as I would present them to others. Each step will be briefly explained using visuals from my own process to guide the instruction. A more thorough explanation of each step's application will be discussed in Chapter II.

1.   **Create a list**

Create a list of your symptoms, sensations, and emotions (SSEs). On a large piece of drafting paper, I listed my symptoms in vertical rows, taking time to reflect on which types of symptomatic affects I experience on a daily basis regardless of diagnosis (Figure 2.) In this list I also included sensations and emotions; for example, "murmuring" and "eat too little or too much" are not listed under the pathology of my disabilities but are valid to my disability experience. These affects are included as they may not be medically considered "symptoms". Once I completed this initial brainstorm, I pulled up the DSM-5 symptom lists for both schizoaffective disorder and borderline personality disorder to add symptoms I related to not yet listed. I acknowledge that formal diagnoses are not accessible to everyone, and that stereotypes in addition to the power dynamics of the mental health industrial complex complicate relationships to diagnosis. Knowing this, Symptom Notation purposefully begins with a self-exploration of symptoms, sensations, and emotions, where all feelings related to one's disability are welcome, regardless if they fit into a diagnostic "mold."
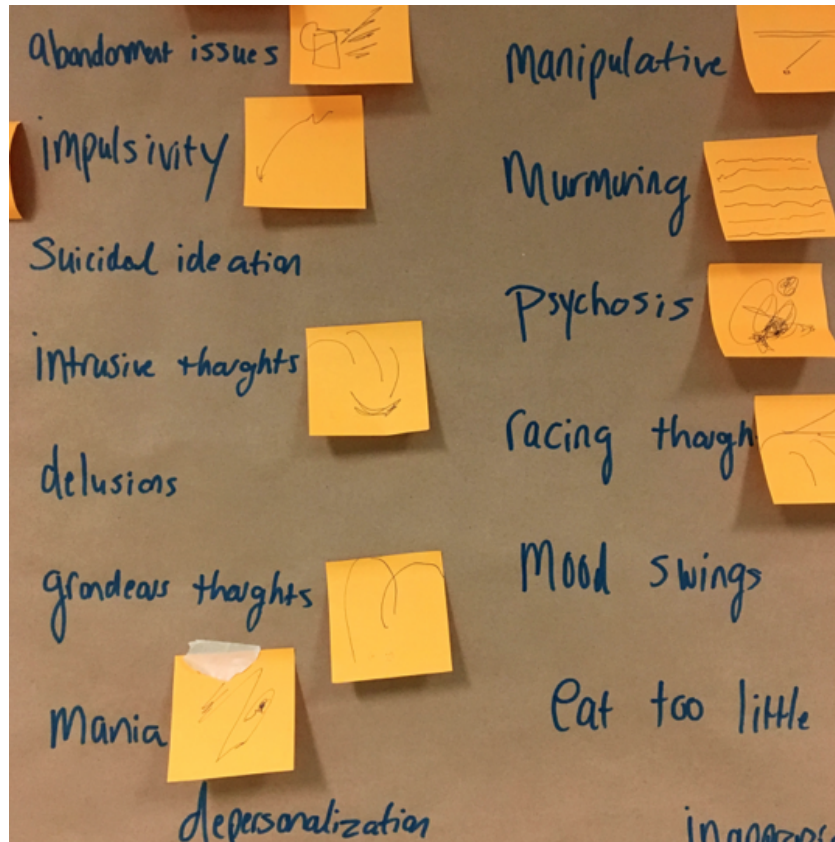
Figure 2. SSE list accompanied with symbols in my studio.

I found a deliberate focus on individual symptoms rather than worrying if I "fit" into an expected pathology of diagnoses to be most reassuring. In my experiences as a "schizoaffective borderline," my symptoms regularly intervene with one another, at times generating such complex forms of embodiment that they feel impossible to define, let alone understood by a medical practitioner. Notating symptoms empowers the users to reflect deeply on their personal experiences, and begins the process of identifying a range of affects and how they manifest in the bodymind.

2.   **<u>Draw a grid</u>**

On an 8.5 x 11 in. piece of paper, choose one SSE and label it at the top left-hand corner of the page. Then, draw a grid of six square using a colored marker. The symptom I chose to focus on first was anxiety, which is an example of an overarching symptom that traverses the boundaries of my disabilities, often causing the other to react. In each of the six squares, I tasked myself with representing the symptom in a quick drawing. Each of the six iterations embody stream-of-conscious responses to how I reconcile anxiety developing and moving throughout my mind and body. I wanted to avoid placing too much decision-making in this exercise, as I deemed it crucial to maintain the exploration as unfiltered and raw as possible. The result of my creative reflections demonstrated fast, fragmented scribbled lines and mark-making, suggesting that my experience with anxiety could be interpreted as chaotic, unpredictable, difficult, and overwhelming. Other note-worthy aesthetics were the minimal amount of negative space, repetition of line, and consistent patterns observable in each thumbnail.

Using a contrasting colored marker, I then went back into my drawings and highlighted moments that felt most memorable or stuck out to me (Figure 3.) Because the initial drawings act more as immediate expulsions of the SSE with little conscious decision-making involved, they may not feel accurate in representation. This is part of the arduous process of unrooting SSE's and creatively exploring them on paper. Isolating sections allows the user to refine the impulsive line drawings and determine parts that, when collectively combined, reflect a more concise image of the chosen SSE.

Figure 3. Completed SSE grid of anxiety, composed of six drawings with highlights.

3.   **Generate a symbol**

Drawing from the use of signs and symbols in notation studies, Step 3 involves

"crafting a container" for your symptom. For this step, draw a symbol on a sticky note that fuses

the highlighted sections from Step 2 and apply it to the surface of your symptom grid.

This symbol will represent your symptom and its determined movement, and will belong to the language of your disability. For my perception of anxiety, I pulled together the highlighted sections of my grid to create an identifiable symbol that I interpreted as a compartmentalized representation of anxiety. The symbol resembles a whirlpool with tight, circular lines at the center, that then dissipates into the background. (Figure 4.) The purpose of the symbol is twofold: it acts as a bridge between the mind and body, and it also contains one's symptom on a physical surface. The symptom symbol caters to the effective use of seeing and holding otherwise incorporeal experiences. By minimizing an all-encompassing symptom into a legible drawing within a small container, a psychological shift occurs, enacting a sense of agency and ownership.

Figure 4. Completed symbol representing anxiety.

4.   **Interpret, record, practice**

Once the symbol is established, determine how you will translate the symbol into

movement. I reflected on my experience with anxiety as a common occurrence that might

originate in my head, chest, or hands. I thought about the mental and bodily movements

caused by heart palpitations, fidgeting, racing thoughts, heavy breathing, and restlessness,

and how each is evoked when I feel anxious. Identifying these locations, degrees of

intensity, and the direction of these bodily experiences all aid in the process of creating choreography. Lastly, hold on to these reflections as you begin to interpret the symbol you have created. The whirlpool imagery of my symbol reminded me of a brain spiraling out or the increasing speed of a beating heart. What type of movement would use both the chest and head? How would this movement engage with the other aspects I have identified? Think about combining these decisions and developing a movement that is comfortable for you and your range of motion. Then, record your movement and add it to a hard-drive or Google drive folder. This helps keep track of your recorded movements for easier access.

5.   **Develop a score**

With symbols and movements completed, a score can be created. This score can be evocative of a prior symptomatic happening, discuss larger or more personal histories, or explore other themes. I first used my notated symptoms to create visual scores of the video documentation of my happenings. The score can also be a collaborative activity. In Figure 5, my partner and I used several of my SSEs to interpret a particular happening that had recently occurred in our lives. The score harks back to the motivations behind *Psychosis Journal* while providing a concrete movement vocabulary for "re-performing" happenings with more likeness. Performing the score silently or through a spoken narrative are possibilities when conducting the choreography, although a narrative affords greater specifics of time and duration. All the elements of the performance are to be interpreted by the performer once the steps have been completed. If performing the score silently, the interpreter has more freedom to abstract the duration of each movement, the arrangement of their succession, and the disclosure of symptoms. If performing the score

with a narrative, the SSEs could be embedded within the writing, and when spoken aloud,

the movement would simultaneously occur.

Figure 5. An example of a notation score based on several of my SSE's.

K. **<u>Conclusion</u>**

This chapter magnified the creative and theorizing becomings that led to Symptom Notation's early development. Evident in *Psychosis Journal* was the realization that archiving tactics are essential to identity formation, as they can track the changes from symptomatic to asymptomatic through processes of documentation. From expelling symptomatic happenings onto the page to the extremes of capturing moments of psychosis on camera, modes of translation and interpretation become equally important. The experiments of *Psychosis Journal* led me on a path to thinking critically about symptoms as a language of impairments. Because of the proliferation of exploring symptoms in medical discourse, symptoms come across as the communicative tissue between how knowledge about madness and disabilities are exchanged. I considered what it might mean to center symptoms as the signs of a language. Dance and music notation practices offer a conglomeration of processes to which systems of language can be developed, looking closely at the roles of image and gesture. If the symptom is the sign, or the music note, of this buddening language, what is the image? What is the gesture? Using the instructions outlined above, my personal experimentations with movement will now shift into the realm of the collaborative, where the epiphanies from *Psychosis Journal* and notation influences I discussed will take on a new light in the project *unbecoming hiding place* (2019).

III. SYMPTOM NOTATION IN UNBECOMING HIDING PLACE: FOSTERING COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION WITH PEOPLE WITH HIDDEN DISABILITIES IN PERFORMANCE

A.   **<u>Introduction</u>**

It's difficult to express the depth to which Symptom Notation mended the otherness I ascribed to my bodymind. Through the trials of *Psychosis Journal*, I adopted a deepened self-reflexiveness that enabled me to think critically about how I could expand my thinking further to the benefit of others. Even in the beginning stages of its development, I contemplated the futurity of Symptom Notation. The potential to evolve a once private investigation of self into a community practice of collaborative self-discovery felt like the necessary next step to providing more resources for disabled people in the community. This shift in purpose was influenced by the success of *Psychosis Journal* and its effect on the communication skills built between myself and my former collaborator. We developed a closer connection as a result of expressing our needs and concerns through a creative medium, which was unlike any level of engagement I've had in socializing with the disability or Mad community. I hoped to locate the primary tenets of *Psychosis Journal* (archive, mark-making, interpretation, communication, vulnerability) into the fabric of Symptom Notation as a performance art project that centralizes diverse bodyminds and encourages the development of dance specifically designed for madness amongst other hidden disabilities. I enter this chapter with questions that linger about Symptom Notation's potential, discussing throughout several methods, theories, and recollections that contributed to the reconfiguration of Symptom Notation into an explorative dance program for people with hidden disabilities.

B.   **Motif Notation**

Research has suggested that notation systems similar to or modified from Labanotation are effective as a learning tool for dance literacy and community building. It is important to recognize the momentous shift in dance notation as once a literacy reserved for trained dancers, to participants and dancers who have never encountered it. Dance scholar Ann Hutchinson Guest's (1992) adaptation of Laban's system, "Motif Notation," was one such shift. Constructed in the 1950s, Hutchinson Guest's "Motif Notation," also known as "Motif Writing," sought to free itself from the constraints and challenges Labanotation imposed by simplifying the choreographic process. When Hutchinson Guest began teaching dance notation to children, she recognized a need to centralize the core tenets of movement. Simultaneously, fellow Labanotation protégé and dance scholar Valerie Preston-Dunlop was teaching Laban to adult participants in the UK when she discovered the effect of privileging symbology over a structured system (Language of Dance Center). Dunlop's "Motif Writing" acts as a creative framework from which students may generate movements based on the predetermined directionality of symbols. Using a basic "staff", Motif Writing "gives the outline of the movement without describing in detail how the actions are to be formed," (Lohmiller 60) thus allowing each student to build upon a simple direction with their own interpretation of time, gesture, and the movement's relation to space. For example, a triangle-shaped arrow pointing right is taught as an indicator for the body to 'move right,' but how the student does so is reflective of their creative freedom. Offering simple instruction, Motif Writing provides a source of inspiration to "those who don't readily connect with dance to have curiosity and confidence that they too can create, explore, express, and learn through dance" (Heiland 2009). Could the same logic be applied to people of all ages searching to understand their non-apparent disabilities? How might dance

notation support the understanding of mental and chronic illnesses for the practitioner and their audience?

C.   **<u>Un/Becoming</u>**

I first encountered the theoretical imagining and application of *un/becoming* in a performance class at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The enigmatic photographs of American photographer, Francesca Woodman, were discussed in light of Deleuze and Guttari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and French philosopher Luce Irigaray's work, where conceptions of "becoming" emerged. Feminist theorist Lone Bertelsen's (2013) poignant piece, "Francesca Woodman: becoming-woman, becoming-imperceptible, becoming-a-subject-in-wonder," examines Woodman's "camouflage" in several of her black-and-white portraits as a type of "photographic air." The "air," which Bertelsen argues is Woodman's vehicle for maneuvering through "the process of becoming,"[5] allows her to move freely between corporeal and incorporeal forms of being (18). The "incompleteness" of Woodman's imagery provokes a response in the viewer to reflect on the boundaries of perceptibility. For Bertelsen, Woodman's work "is about a becoming in which the female body is deterritorialized in order to render its becoming with the world visible," (19) rather than disappearing as some might suggest of Woodman's spectral, blurry body.[6]

The photographic "air" Bertelsen explores of Woodman's ephemeral becoming casts a provocative light on the notion of "unbecoming" or what it means to "unbecome." Novelist Rebecca Sherm's fictitious tale of deceit, secrecy, and fraud, *Unbecoming* (2015), weaves in the capricious lives of several characters following an art heist. Without directly citing

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[5] See Deleuze and Guattari, 177.
[6] On Woodman's work, see Marian Goodman Gallery: https://www.mariangoodman.com/artists/72-francesca-woodman/.

"unbecoming" as a method, it's evident that Sherm is considering the meanings of the term as the basis to construct her character's development in the heist's aftermath.[7] The New York Times writes of Sherm's "narrative technique [as] disorienting… devoted to flashbacks and flashforwards," (Stasio 2015) where the illusive main character, Grace, seemingly develops (or returns) to her "true" identity while concomitantly dismantling her forged, alter identification, Julie. Effectively, Grace *becomes* in the performative act of "*unbecoming who she has become,*" (ibid) fixating on the process of identity building through a series of actions, thus bringing Judith Butler's theory of performativity to mind. The "incompleteness" of Grace's identity remains in the ongoing process of her complex unraveling from herself as "Julie." The theoretical use of unbecoming, then, functions as a hyperbolic extension of identity fluctuation and development, pointing towards the creation of a new *something* in the deliberate deconstruction or unraveling of an existing form of being, or its disguise.

D.   **Origins of unbecoming hiding place**

I was intrigued by this amorphous, shapeshifting idea of self in relation to navigating hidden disability. The title of the piece, *unbecoming hiding place* (yes, lowercase), correlates a conflation of identity destabilization and formation within personal memory. In thinking of the very first moment I recognized my madness, I was a second grader playing a game of "manhunt" with my brother and our neighbors. I can recall diving down into a ditch in pitch darkness, hiding from the "hunter," and even today, that distinct aroma of moist dirt lingers in my sensorial consciousness. To my left was the street that passed in front of my house with a single streetlight located where the sloping ditch begins. As I hid, my left side periphery captures an opaque,

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[7] Unbecoming (adj.): not appropriate, attractive, flattering; not in accord with the standards implied by one's character or position.

moving, practically ghost-like figure approaching the ditch from under the streetlight. I slowly

turn to look. Consumed by fear, a legless, floating mass composed of oscillating eyeballs slowly

enters down into the ditch, coming towards me. My ears are ringing as distant, layered voices

cloud my ability to focus and recognize this creature. Instinctively, I frantically desert the ditch,

slipping onto the wet dirt—my clothes filthy from the flailing army crawl. I race towards the

back porch light, refusing another glimpse at the being, terrified of the thought of it following, let

alone catching me as my feet go numb. I didn't know that I was screaming until I was met by my

mother on the porch, visibly alarmed. I remember attempting to express, as an eight-year-old,

what I had seen when in fact I could not make sense of it, other than claiming it as a ghost. My

mother, brother, and friends suggested that I had seen a deer or that the headlights of an

oncoming car distorted the shadows of the trees. But I knew that whatever I saw, no one else

could possibly witness it. It was a feeling, a moment of recognition that I had a heightened

ability, assuming then that I might be a psychic or destined communicator of the dead. What I

could not fathom, until the creature returned periodically as I aged, in lieu of the manifestation of

other psychotic and mood-based symptoms, was that I was in fact Mad, or "becoming Mad," and

that whatever Mad-less identity I possessed prior to this incident was gone. In this moment, I

crossed a threshold of "unbecoming," where my pre-existing, presumed sane child mind was

unraveling as a new complex identity formed.

This distinct memory was shared with the participants in the very beginning of the

project, as I was ruminating on a potential title and theme. Some of the participants shared

similar experiences of "crossing" from non-disabled to disabled, whether this was an early

childhood recognition of having been born disabled, or a clear, dramatic event such as mine.

However disability or madness came to be, the participants considered the paradoxical act of

unbecoming relevant to their own stories, thus centering the theory of unbecoming with the practice of revealing one's self. This opened up several possible approaches to creating the live performance, mainly in terms of what we hoped to invoke. Theatre and performance studies scholar Jill Dolan (2005) describes one such possibility: the utopian performance. In her text, *Utopia in Performance*, Dolan writes of live performance's world-making capabilities, in that performance welcomes moments of allyship, meaningful collaboration, and a moment to "reinvest our energies in a different future" (64). Dolan argues, "Utopian performatives, in their doings, make palpable an affective version of how the world might be better," (6) proposing that, in the fleeting moment of performance, reimagined futures and communities are made possible. As these profound performatives incite intense wonder from the audience, Dolan reminds us that "utopia," which translates to "no-place" in Greek, is not found in the world as we know it. Instead, Dolan claims that "a utopia is always a process, always only partially grasped, as it disappears before us around the corners of narrative and social experience" (165).

On the basis of process and reimagining alternative ways of being in the world, Disability Studies scholar Alison Kafer (2013) offers the concept "crip time" as yet another vehicle for disabled bodies and minds to occupy. What could register as a mode of time in Dolan's utopian performance, "crip time" establishes a so-called "bending of the clock" that grants disabled people "more time to accomplish something or arrive somewhere" (26). Kafer's analysis of "crip time" goes further to understand flexibility as a necessary tenet to which crip time successfully accommodates disabled bodies and minds, while confronting capitalist, heteronormative expectations of time, productivity, and participation (27). Ideas about disability and the future are shrouded by the ableism that pervades our culture, and it became clear through the thread that ties these texts together, that a flexible, utopian performance, bound by its own imagined limits

and possibilities was crucial. I decided that the live performance of *unbecoming hiding place* would suspend itself as a utopian harbor for which disabled, Mad, and Sick performers could demand presence, acceptance, and validation.

E.   **The Process of unbecoming**

The following section follows the steps of Symptom Notation in the process of generating *unbecoming hiding place,* beginning in late February 2019. Collected fieldnotes, lasting impressions, and archival materials help to visualize Symptom Notation as the methodology for building choreography and constructing a live performance.

1.   **February 2019**

unbecoming began as a collective symptom, sensation, or emotion (SSE) identification and sharing session. Each participant mapped out their physical and mental symptoms based on their own understanding of their experiences, with or without a formal diagnosis. Using the guidelines I presented in chapter one, the participants developed lists of symptoms sourced from the DSM-5 to more nuanced, individualistic sensations or phobias. The DSM-5 was offered as a jumping off point for participants, primarily due to the text's relevance in medical treatment as a diagnostic tool. For some participants, the DSM-5 is recognizable and helpful in listing symptoms that are generally associated with the label of their disability, whereas for others, the DSM-5 represents damaging medical interventions and perspectives. Using this text is not a necessity by any means, but it might prove beneficial to those interested in exploring the nature of their impairments through a published, medicalized lens. More importantly, participants are encouraged to generate lists based on their symptomatic experiences, with specific attention towards sensations and emotions that feel integral to their disabilities. A few examples of such symptoms were: "fear of childbirth," "night terrors," and

"jaw cocking / dislocation." Due to the time constraints of *unbecoming,* participants were asked to choose only fifteen of their symptoms; particularly, SSEs they either felt most estranged by or closest too. I instructed the participants to record each SSE on a small piece of paper and to include below three words that "reflect, locate, or embody" the term. Words ranged from body parts and memories to the causes responsible for the development of each SSE. I noted that every participant approached this process with a unique relationship to self-analysis which affected their comfort level. The participants with formal diagnoses or openly self-identify as disabled or mentally ill engaged in the initial process with greater ease. This ease could be due to the active participation select participants already possessed in regard to their identities, in turn lessening the unfamiliarity of exploring symptoms. It was clear amongst all of the participants, however, that a mutual yearning for community and expression had led them to this project.

To begin the drawing phase, participants labeled each of their grids with the fifteen SSEs chosen from their list to develop. Using a colored marker of their choice, participants created a six/square grid for each SSE. I then asked participants to choose one SSE to begin, thinking critically and inventively about: 1) what they perceive the "energy" of the SSE feels like; 2) the physicality of the SSE as something solid, fluid, rigid, or soft; 3) the speed in which the SSE exists or travels in the bodymind; and 4) the direction in which the SSE travels in the bodymind. These prompts help to envision the symptom, sensation, or emotion as a thing, as opposed to an affect. Noncorporeal energies like feelings, thoughts and certain symptoms have the tendency to be without location or defy a sense of control. It can feel overwhelming to pinpoint such affects physically. My intention for this step is to show the practitioner that by processing SSEs through the body, the transmission between interior and exterior lives can become more stable and understandable. Guiding this visualizing practice with specific criteria tends to alleviate (at least

mildly) anxieties associated with encountering memories or intrusive thoughts triggered by the SSE and the participants' present experience of attempting to codify it. A few participants commented on the complexity of imagining their SSEs using the prompts, opting instead to approach the drawings as purely unconscious in hopes of uncovering meanings just below the surface. However participants felt most comfortable to draw, I only asked that they work quickly to avoid the bearing of thought and revision.

This exercise of "expulsions," as I say, is one of several points of translation in Symptom Notation's process. The purpose for the exercise is to position drawing as an instrumental method of studying internalized experiences, eliciting the subconscious to assist in meaning-making. Parallel to the technique of automatic drawing forwarded by the Surrealists, the role of drawing in Symptom Notation bridges the physical body with the mind, supplying a channel in which the consciousness surrounding one's disability identity can be transmitted onto the page. In developing this step, I struggled with the difficulty of trying to articulate a symptom through drawing without the influence of personal or external biases. Even when my artist training persistently meddled with my enthusiasm for chance, the potential of "letting go" and fully embracing an unbridled flow felt necessary in the ongoing search of self. Drawing quickly and without inhibition produces a groundwork from which one can excavate and pick apart. The six drawings for each grid could be understood as wild and unabashedly raw glimpses or indicators of the SSE you are attempting to pinpoint and develop greater insight into.

Once completed, I walk the participants through the excavation process they underwent to reflect together. Many questioned, "What happens with the 'expulsion drawings' now? How do they infer meaning? These look like third grader scribbles to me. I don't see how they represent my chosen SSE at all." These claims and moments of frustration are valid. I was not

surprised to receive this feedback based on my experience working and developing Symptom

Notation and encountering similar feelings of confusion and displeasure. To remedy the macro-

ness of these drawings is the creation of the symbol, which would act as a container and sole

representation of an SSE and eventually, its accompanied movement. Creating a symbol is the

solution to the untapped fertility embedded in the expulsion drawings, providing in essence a

scaled down, calculated alternative. The construction of a symbol is a deliberate edit and visual

move towards compacting the experience of an SSE into a legible sign.

The participants were instructed to choose a different color marker to begin the symbol-

making process. With this marker, each participant was prompted to return to their expulsion

drawings and begin highlighting, circling, underlining, or otherwise identifying portions of the

drawings that they felt could be modified to symbolize their SSE. They were told that the

highlighted sections would be combined to create their symbol. Knowing this, the intentionality

of the participants' involvement shifted. They responded to the task attentively; their focus now

fixated on precision in contrast to foregoing censorship as asked previously. In the making of my

symbols, I thought, what is the sign for mania? Which features will inform me of my relationship

with this symptom? Is this symbol legible enough for me to remember that it signifies

mania? By leaving the decision-making up to the participants, they exercised a novel way of

engaging with their disability that restores a sense of ownership, empowerment, and self-

knowledge.

The participants pondered these among other questions as they explored symbol making

on a separate sheet of paper. I observed as they configured shapes and signs using the

highlighted sections they had charted. Some had developed multiple symbols and expressed

difficulty in choosing just one. Others felt challenged by pulling together their parts into a whole.

During many moments I held myself back from facilitating, fearful that my presence might influence the personal decisions surrounding their symbol. I reminded myself of the insecurities and countless instances of uncertainty I faced throughout *Psychosis Journal*'s becoming, and how inflicting constant disapproval on my explorations impacted the project's outcome and its steps towards Symptom Notation. The process was private in its origin because I was deeply concerned by the powers of criticism and persuasion in affecting my thinking and relationship to the notation. I admit that my hypersensitivities pressured my newfound role as a teacher of Symptom Notation, but the participants, who had at this point become dear friends, grounded me as a forever student/teacher, sharing with me the qualities of their disabilities and the experiences that guided their decision-making. Their symbols, as testaments to the half-way point of this project, contributed to a broadening language of hidden disability.

Displayed in a circular shape, each participant laid out their SSE grids in groupings across the floor for a "carousel" type walkaround. Imprinted in my mind is the vibrant painting that unknowingly emerged from the grids. Until this point, only my grids have been seen side by side, and now dozens of drawings with extraordinary styles of drawing, handwriting, and patterns of color and shape were transforming the floor of our workspace. It was the first of many opportunities that the symptoms we have struggled to understand, cope with, or have others recognize, could be reimagined as intricately creative extensions of ourselves. I was taken aback by the grids' semblances to 20th century graphic notation scores. Without sharing the scores of Kaprow, Cage, or other notation makers with the participants, their grids unknowingly assimilated into the legacy of notation, with each grid possessing a distinctive language special to its maker. Participants eagerly surveyed one another's work, often crouching down to engage in the intricacies of their mark-making. The participants' appreciation for one another's approach

to this step was palpable. I had come to understand in that moment that this project would exceed my expectations for community building and reaffirm the power of togetherness in the collective search for identity.

After reviewing the work of their peers, I prompted participants to make themselves comfortable within the space. Yoga mats, cushions, blankets, and upright chairs were strewn along the perimeter. A kettle with assorted teas, basket of clementines, and small candies sat on a table nearby. In my time working in and around Chicago's disability arts and culture scene, the intentional privileging of access, care, and hospitality were quintessential. Weeks prior in early February, I attended a workshop facilitated by artist and disability culture activist Claire Cunningham and choreographer Jess Curtis at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. The movement-based workshop foregrounded their performance set for the weekend, emphasizing audio description as a potential creative and also accessible aesthetic in performance.[8] I remember entering the theatre space and being invited to choose amongst the various seating. There were taped out sections on the stage in anticipation that workshop or audience attendees may be wheelchair users. When the workshop concluded, I left with a heightened awareness of audio description in more active roles, but it was my perception of comfort, and how we cater to those who engage in our work, that was unexpectedly altered. Something as simple as integrating multimodal seating options for participation or viewership unlocks a level of trust and hospitality I rarely encountered outside of disability spaces. How would the dance world change if comfort was universally held to such a standard? More exciting, how would the interplay of access, inclusion, and comfort stimulate fresh approaches to learning and experiencing performance?

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[8] See MCA press release: https://mcachicago.org/Calendar/2018/02/Claire-Cunningham-Jess-Curtis-The-Way-You-Look-At-Me-Tonight.

Participants were asked to evaluate their processes of developing and revising their expulsion drawings into symbols. Was there a series of unspoken preferences or rules that was guiding their decision making? What were the conditions that helped them to create a symbol? Participants were welcomed to complete this step outside of the weekly workshop if it benefited their routines. A few recounted the experience of developing their symbols before bed, on public transit, or in a coffee shop. Others preferred the communal workspace, commenting on the motivation that compelled them through the productivity of others and my physical availability to answer questions. The exercises of symbol building and self-directed choreography often take shape as detached, privatized matters encompassed in personal experiences and understandings regarding their unique symptomologies. One reconnecting method in Symptom Notation happens through hosting open discussions about individual and collective processes regularly with an emphasis on "checking in." Participants frequently report on their progress and well/being tangentially, as these informal conversations in some ways recount the cathartic qualities of talk or art-based therapies they are most familiar with. Although Symptom Notation is not intended for clinicalization, an aim of the method is to lead participants through an extensive exploration of their SSE's using creative means, which may likely induce therapeutic effects. The combination of artmaking and discussion in Symptom Notation elevates the relationship between community care and collaboration.

2. **<u>March 2019: Choreography</u>**

When the participants returned the following week, the space was open and awaiting moving bodies. From this point, participants begin to bridge the drawing and discussion skills they've developed into interpretative and analytical approaches to building choreography. The posed prompts recalled the questions they explored in the drawing phase, focusing with

greater attention on the body: Where does the SSE manifest in the bodymind? How does the SSE manifest and if it travels, where too? How long does it take for the movement to manifest? These questions, although influenced by the principles of developing dance from notation, direct participants to locate the spatial orientation, speed, and areas of the body for which their movements will be performed. A fraction of the participants did not identify as dancers, movers, or performers, so their eagerness to learn was inextricable from their anxiety of participating in an unfamiliar form of expression. Part of my role was to help participants realize that movement was not as foreign as they believed. Because I entered the world of dance with no formal training or techniques, I gravitated to simple motions: rolling my neck, stretching my arms, and curling into a small ball. These movements responded to coping mechanisms and stretching routines that my body was already well acquainted with. Most importantly, these movements honored the comfort and flexibility of my body's repertoire.[9]

I observed as participants tenderly explored their own repertories and relationships to movement. I admired the contours of their bodies unfolding and was struck by the evident trust held for one another. Together, we performed a few stretching exercises to allow them to become present within themselves and conscious of the shared environment. Participants then scattered around the space, displaying their symbols, and I watched as they individually processed the symbols using parts of the bodies. I was drawn by the innate responses each participant demonstrated towards their symbol and the interpretation of their SSE. With little instruction, participants practiced developing choreography using varying levels of speed, standing and sitting positions, and incorporating facial expressions in tandem with the movements. I would

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[9] Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor discusses how the body embodies memories and remembers differently than the mind's way of processing memories. The "repertoire" Taylor understands is the physicality of memory as projected by and through the body.

occasionally intervene, particularly if a participant felt stuck or unsure about approaching a certain symbol. In one instance, I recalled a participant who experienced doubt in attempting to represent, fully, the essence of depression. They asked (as I remember it), "How can I develop a movement that evokes depression when depression feels like the complete opposite.. Like a huge weight, or a rock, was placed on your body and you are paralyzed with fear, anxiety, hopelessness…". The participant was visibly concerned about the multiple SSEs bound in the fabric of their depression and how to best portray these SSEs through a singular movement. What was insightful about this response was the metaphor of a heavy mass pressing down on the participant, forcing depression and its lingering sensations to occur. I suggested to the participant that movement may not always be an active or spry motion; in fact, movements that favor stillness or are produced with miniscule contortions in the muscles are just as agile in their meaning. It was exciting to witness how this revelation impacted the participant, who ultimately developed a fetal position, rocking slowly with clear intentions to break free from the invisible weight above.

This groundbreaking interaction was one of several throughout the few weeks of building choreography. I stressed that these rehearsed movements should be specific to each of their unique experiences with SSEs. In creating their individual movements, the participants developed a means of communication, just as I did in *Psychosis Journal* and Symptom Notation, that offers a movement vocabulary for understanding nuanced experiences with physical and cognitive impairments. I asked that once each movement was solidified, that the movement be recorded in a five second interval to be added to the digital archive of the group's individual choreographies. The dual purpose of this archive serves as a database for rehearsing and functions as a work in itself, as one of the becomings integral to Symptom Notation's

collaborative outcome. As the live performance date loomed, the group transitioned from building choreography to weaving their SSEs and corroborating movements into a collective narrative, centered by one prevailing issue fundamental to our hidden disability identities.

3.   **Mid-March 2019: Locating the narrative**

But how would we situate our choreographies into an overarching narrative and what is that omnipresent affect that connects all of our lives? The participants and I agreed to construct the live performance around the concept of "passing." For people living with nonvisible disabilities, such as mental illness, the dual performance and performativity of "passing as sane" is an inseparable politic entangled in histories of involuntary institutionalization and discrimination. According to artist scholar Peta Cox (2013), "Passing as sane occurs when a person who is experiencing psychological distress or non-normative emotional states or cognition manages to avoid displaying these states in the presence of others," thereby passing undetected (100). The act of passing as sane destabilizes sound understandings of "acting" and "being," where passing might be a deliberate choice or involuntary "depending on a person's specific embodiment" and "how others interpret this embodiment" (ibid). Embodiment can be understood further through disability studies scholar Tobin Sieber's (2008) theory of "complex embodiment," which alludes to how the individual is socially identifying, valuing, and embracing their disabled bodymind as is (27). The interplay of embodiment and passing can also be understood in the frame of chronic illness. Feminist and disability studies scholar Susan Wendell (2001) advocates for the recognition of chronic illnesses in discourses of disability and impairment. People living with chronic illness, which Wendell argues are loosely categorized as either "healthy" or "unhealthy," (163) voluntarily and involuntarily are entangled in forms of passing that are shrouded by suspicion—"suspicion how ill/disabled we really are,

how or why we became ill, whether we are doing everything possible to get well [...]" (Wendell 1996). Like madness, chronic illnesses share in the vexing concerns associated with passing that disturbs disability identification and belonging, suggesting that a turn towards confronting the dependency on disability visibility as "verification" is imperative.

4. **Late-March 2019: Script writing**

With the theme of "passing" identified, and all of the steps of Symptom Notation complete, a script for *unbecoming* could be constructed. The script would follow the writing style of consecution, which I first introduced in this paper as the method of "going backwards in order to move forward." Aligned with the logic of (un)becoming, this methodology would allow myself and the participants to revisit memories formulative to our disability identities and the concept of passing, to effectively invent a futurity for ourselves. The autobiographical anecdote behind *unbecoming* was the basis for what types of writing the participants could offer towards the script. I emphasized including memories that concentrated on identity formation and passing, suggesting that literal and figurative "hiding places," which could directly respond to issues of disability and Mad oppression, race, gender, and class, would support the theme well. Specifically, I prompted the participants to reflect on their SSEs as integral to the narratives they share, as an important instruction for writing the script was to include their SSEs throughout. By directly integrating the SSEs into the narratives, participants would perform the assigned choreographic gesture as the text is read aloud. For example, if a participant says, "I laid beneath my bed, violently *panicking,* as I attempted to grasp my reality," the movement that accompanies "panic/panicking" is performed when spoken. This continues the circular translation process by re-applying the interpretive movement back into the original term, instilled now with greater meaning and comprehension.

The deliberate fracturing and stitching together of each participant's story into the script functioned as a continuation of queering time and space. While certain monologues were kept intact, much of the script's sentences were composed using phrases from three or more narratives at once, dislocating the script from any particular person, place, or time. Through non-chronological story-telling, participants individually built what disability studies scholar Carrie Sandahl (2004) defines as "interpretive frameworks." Because the nature of interpretive frameworks "privilege the particularities of experience [and] not their generalization," (583) participants could overlap various versions of themselves, nuanced by the inter-mingling of their identities, to construct a fuller picture of their experiences living with madness or a hidden disability. The juxtaposition of these identities invokes a "prodding [of] audiences to reconsider their assumptions [...] and relationships" to the "differences and commonalities" (ibid) of these layered interpretive frameworks individually and also, in the case of *unbecoming*, collectively. I likened the idea of kindling Dolan's utopian performance in *unbecoming* through the assembling of interpretive frameworks with methods of fragmentation and abstraction, as this would recall the affective nature of memories, passing, and embodiment. It allowed us to purport the live performance as an interstice, or a disruption, of present time to conjure a temporal history of hidden disability experiences.

5. **<u>April 2019: The performance</u>**

On April 15, 2019, *unbecoming hiding place* was presented to a live audience at Zhou B Art Center in Chicago for the School of the Art Institute's IMPACT Festival. Just as we did in our weekly workshops, a curation of yoga mats, cushions, chairs, and taped outlines indicating spaces for wheelchair users were positioned around the large performance space. Providing multimodal seating and physical copies of the script were a few accommodations the

group and I planned to offer audiences. Anticipation grew as audience members filled the space.

Unbeknownst to the audience, the performers were seated among them, anxiously awaiting the

moment they would soon individually rise and activate the performance. I recall faces of

surprise, confusion, and astonishment as performers rose to speak their lines, bringing to the

forefront the presence of people with hidden disabilities. Who is a performer? Who is part of the

audience? Who is disabled, who is not? The initial ambiguity of these categories was then shaped

by the performers deliberate "unbecoming" of their collective passing, although I wondered

whether the uncertainty of assuming identities lingered over the audience, even after the

performance concluded. The opening maneuver to rise and come forward was, in the clearest

sense, the first of many unveilings *unbecoming hiding place* presented. In that moment, we were

no longer comfortable with hiding from our identities or our place in the world. Our presence

commanded the space in the most passionate, tender, and emotionally exposed manner.

I could not believe how quickly 38 minutes passed us. In almost a blur, after weeks of

rehearsing, the movements, monologues, and collaborative gestures were performed. I held such

pride for the participants-now-performers whom I have come to know so dearly. Several

audience members were crying as clapping erupted. The performers and I held one another so

tightly out of exhaustion, excitement, relief, pride, vulnerability; I could not have been prouder.

It's interesting to think back to the live performance as more of a blurred moment in comparison

to the extended process of creating *unbecoming*, which in my view, was the *real, nitty gritty*

work of this project. Symptoms were cracked open, analyzed, interpreted, discussed, translated,

shared with strangers. Many of the performers tell me that the live performance felt much like an

extension, that the process felt like the work itself, and that the takeaways they had hoped for—

community building, self-empowerment, hidden disability knowledge—were developed

throughout the becomings. In recognizing the special properties of process in artmaking and expression, I now understand Symptom Notation as a method that does not necessarily require a determined outcome; the outcome could instead derive from the revelations, pains, and joys of our labors.

F.   **<u>Conclusion</u>**

unbecoming hiding place was not merely a collective reckoning of Mad and hidden disability exposure. It was a staged happening, in which audience members were confronted with the desires, demands, fears, and optimisms of disabled performers who wished to be seen and heard. For us, *unbecoming* was intended as a utopian performance; a prolonged declaration and a rare space of hyper-visibility to our beings, our performativities, and most importantly, our hopes for an inclusive future. Performance Studies scholar Jose Munoz (2009) asserted that the utopia is "something that should mobilize us, push us forward… [that] it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibilities, not a fixed schema" (97). Everything from *unbecoming's* process of becoming, all the way to its live, performative happening, was an experimental blueprint driven by a shared belief of enacting change. The performers and myself had dug so deeply into our own identities and personal experiences with disability during the three-month long Symptom Notation process that the live performance could only embody the cumulative utopia we committed ourselves too. I had recognized the rarity of what we were making together and amazed by the intimacy a group of strangers could gift one another in such a short amount of time. The collision of our narratives in the outcome of practicing Symptom Notation may have only occurred for a brief 38 minutes, but *unbecoming* continues to live on in the archives and within each of our consciousness.

V. CONCLUSION

What I have savored most in writing this thesis was the ability to navigate channels of thought, memory, and creation through a theoretical and methodological lens. From the experimentation of *Psychosis Journal* to the community building of *unbecoming hiding place*, Symptom Notation's becomings have threaded through ideas of agency, identity, empowerment, knowledge, and collaboration. Essential to reaching Symptom Notation was the pursuit in understanding the self fully, which, beginning with my own experiences, was complicated by the instability of madness as a fluctuating state of being. The ebbs and flows of Mad and hidden disability identities consistently encounter problems of wholeness and belonging that, in turn, fabricate negative and minimizing perspectives about ourselves. In a world where seeing is so-called believing, people with non-apparent disabilities struggle to recognize themselves and be recognized by others, leading to a distinct binary between the mind, or interior life, with the conceivable, physical body. The objective of Symptom Notation intended on countering these obstacles with identity and community by developing a movement system that codifies symptoms, sensations, and emotions (SSEs) into a bodily language that effectively galvanizes self-discovery, creativity, and modalities of expression. In the trajectory of exploring the self through processes of research, translation, and memory, Symptom Notation serves as a method of producing knowledge that reifies Mad, Sick, and disabled experiences by centering the bodymind as an indispensable epistemology.

A. **Review of Thesis Structure**

In Chapter II, Symptom Notation's becomings began on a personal journey to reach across states of being. The symptomatic and asymptomatic self, which would guide this research throughout, were two, isolated planes of my identity that distorted my ability to embrace the

unique particularities of my Mad experience. I was initially led to believe that madness was an identity to be ashamed of, that should remain out of the public eye, thus situating my explorations of self within the home. But as work created by Mad artists, such as Bryan Charnley's self-portraiture, entered my purview, I observed a sense of community, or lineage, that was absent. For the first time, I perceived aspects of myself in the eyes of another artist's approach to creativity, which was equally exciting, scary, and filled me with great empathy. The small steps of breaking out of my mental hiding place were not simply conducive to my growth, but to the trust embedded in the romantic and working relationship with my then-partner. It's safe to say that the estranged relationship I shared with my disability caused several rifts, primarily due to communication and how we were negotiating care. The concept of tracking my symptomatic experiences with the help of my partner was a decision to gain greater access to my embodied Other: the version of myself that was frightening in its unknowability. I heard from my partner among others how my bodymind dramatically shifted in the course of a symptomatic happening, and it was this continuous story-telling that finally motivated me to seek agency within my own narrative.

Psychosis Journal, as it came to be known, was a series of processes that underscored the values of documentation, interpretation, and dance as translation. With the journal, I captured glimpses of the raging symptomatic self in panic, psychosis, mania, among other extreme moments of impairment, onto the page. My hand acted as the transmitter through which my internalized experiences could be relayed through lines, color, and occasionally jumbled text. The key was attempting to decode these traces of madness once I returned to a calmer, asymptomatic state. A significant distance still existed between the live happening and its record, but my partner and I were beginning to pick up clues about the delusions and paranoid thoughts

that were difficult for me to express verbally. The verbal element of communication in the midst of crisis was the peak of the happening, as inaudible, frantic, fractured syllables and disorganized speech were seemingly the limits. Even as I began to interpret the drawings through the body, I faced what felt like an insurmountable blockage to the authenticity of the happening: What was I actually feeling or trying to say? Is there a way for me to get closer to this great unknown? I considered the possibility of capturing the happenings on camera, for it would show the unfiltered self from my partner's eyes. There may be no fool-proof approach to comprehending the interior life of madness when your consciousness temporarily departs during intense symptomatic episodes, but I assumed that confronting the Other might be a starting point.

Staring at myself, which in those moments were entirely unfamiliar reflections, alienated me further. It was not only challenging for me and my partner to record these happenings on camera, but the labor of taking in my writhing, screaming body in its raw form was unbearable. I recognized that building a closer relationship to my Mad identity would not come from an outsider perspective; rather, it would require a deeper look into the symptoms that were present and how they dictate the relationship between my mind and body. The footage was at least crucial to acknowledging certain symptoms affecting my communication and thinking capacities. However, I needed to dig deeper, and return to methods of interpretation that would allow me to visualize a picture of my symptomatic mentality, from an asymptomatic state. By doing so, symptomatic and asymptomatic states would become interdependent, reliant on the other to fulfill their role in supplying information towards the translations. This shift back to the body repositioned the bodymind as a collaborative epistemology, where knowledge about embodiments could be produced through a reimagining of psychosomatic transmissions.

With *Psychosis Journal*, I moved the archival element of the process into the realm of dance. The journal now served as a text of code to be deciphered in search of comprehending Mad realities. I utilized my body as a translation device by revaluing variations of line thickness and speed through improvised gestures. With organization having little bearing yet, the movements produced directly followed the navigating lines, performed in real time with no rehearsal. This meant that each re-performance of the journal entries could not be replicated in exactness. Although I appreciated the mirroring of *Psychosis Journal's* performances to the impulsivity of the actual symptomatic happenings, the lack of control and organization in this approach to dance complicated a sound understanding of how symptoms affected my bodymind. An ideal system of translation would require a set procedure that would pull from the drawing and moving techniques of *Psychosis Journal* into a notational and choreographic process. Music and dance notation practices ranging from John Cage's graphic notation scores to the choreographic scores of Labanotation and Motif Writing offered up possibilities of codifying the symptoms I was working with through a language of determined signs and symbols. Unlike purely improvised responses to drawings, notation functions categorically with instructions, allowing the material to be re-performed by the practitioner, taught to others, and preserved for future reconfigurations.

In Chapter III, the transition from *Psychosis Journal* to Symptom Notation was led by a symptom list I developed in the course of working through *Psychosis Journal.* These symptoms, which have一throughout these processes一virtually remained unchanged, were the foundation for Symptom Notation's move towards choreographing mental movements using representational symbols. I kept *Psychosis Journal's* initial process of automatic drawing in Symptom Notation, as I felt that the uninhibited conscious would still result in imagery and

words useful to translation. From there, Symptom Notation departed from *Psychosis Journal's* simple, improvised guidelines to more direct engagement with the drawings themselves. What if the initial, "expulsion" drawings did not correlate with the idea or presentation of a certain symptom? Thinking reflexively, I opted to highlight decision-making in Symptom Notation to the effect of bridging the symptomatic and asymptomatic states of mind even closer. Only now, I was venturing into a fuller picture of internalized experiences by considering hidden disabilities as a category worth including in the goal of this project. Throughout this paper, I alternate between madness and hidden disabilities as both exclusive (historically madness and disability center around very different politics of oppression and needs) and integral to one another, undivided by desires for inclusion within the overarching community of global disability. As Symptom Notation's aim to represent nonapparent symptoms and experiences through dance became clearer, the move away from my personal relationship to madness and into the realm of community and collaboration began.

B. **Crucial Findings**

During the process of building *unbecoming hiding place,* I immediately picked up on the differences in practicing Symptom Notation collaboratively. No longer just a performer, I facilitated each of the steps with the participants across several weeks of workshopping. It was important to feel present in these teachings and with the participants, as they offered me their time, efforts, and trust. For many participants, this was their first experience with developing choreography and performing, and I was continuously adamant about ensuring that their trust and safety were honored. They not only committed to exploring their minds and bodies in vulnerable ways, but they willingly disclosed their disability experiences to dozens of spectators, despite the risks of stigma and social exclusion. The tremendous insight I gained from learning

about the participants' stories and how their symptomologies have shaped their life still resonate with me.

The process of workshopping and performing the collaborative piece *unbecoming hiding place* functioned as the answer to Symptom Notation's egress from *Psychosis Journal's* thinking. I felt that I was developing a practice quintessential to identity formation and community building because of its process to identify, interpret, translate, and express hidden disability symptomologies. The fundamentals of Symptom Notation were evocative of dance notation as a teaching tool and the experimental revaluing of drawings into musical scores. Together, these notation approaches prompted the possibility of a new genre of disability dance that would center madness and hidden disabilities at the forefront of expressing interior, symptomatic happenings through the physical body. The relevancy of such a form would broaden the scope of disability dance, but go further to integrate people with hidden disability experiences deeper into the fabric of disability arts and culture. Symptom Notation also functions as an alternative form of artistry, healing, and community building that medical treatments can not always serve. In fact, Symptom Notation is a tool that can be used by the individual and/or in a group setting, whether or not a performance is the end goal. Most importantly to the goal of Symptom Notation is the availability of another, accessible form of self-care for Mad, Sick, and disabled people to practice when needed.

C.   **Future Scholarship**

To conclude this project two years after *unbecoming* and seven months into writing a thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic, I want to reiterate my hopes for Symptom Notation and the many becomings that led to its conception. As do existing forms of dance and music notation, Symptom Notation welcomes adaptation and reframing. Symptom Notation is designed to shift

and meet the needs of each practitioner. The guidelines offered in this paper were effective in the pilot program that was *unbecoming*, but have not since been utilized in projects of mine. When I do revisit Symptom Notation's process and literature in the future, I plan to dig deeper into some of the terminology introduced in this text, like symptomatic 'happenings', to locate these theorizings back into the realm of art Happenings and develop their concepts further. I also foresee myself expanding upon the current guidelines as Symptom Notation continues to be reworked with future participants, with the primary tenets of the system still geared towards stimulating agency, empowerment, and knowledge production.

The musings I have of Symptom Notation's reach are always growing. I intend on producing more workshop opportunities for Symptom Notation to be experienced in conference, school, and community settings. I hope to teach Symptom Notation more readily in Mad and disability communities across the United States and beyond, with the hopes of expanding the literature provided in the system's becomings to include more recent findings on madness and hidden disabilities in the arts. In lieu of preserving a disability futurity, perhaps Symptom Notation could facilitate a cross-disability coalition project that brings together people with all types of disabilities to engage in a collective sharing of experiences with impairment, with the aim of empowering all disabled bodyminds to move forwards, together.

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