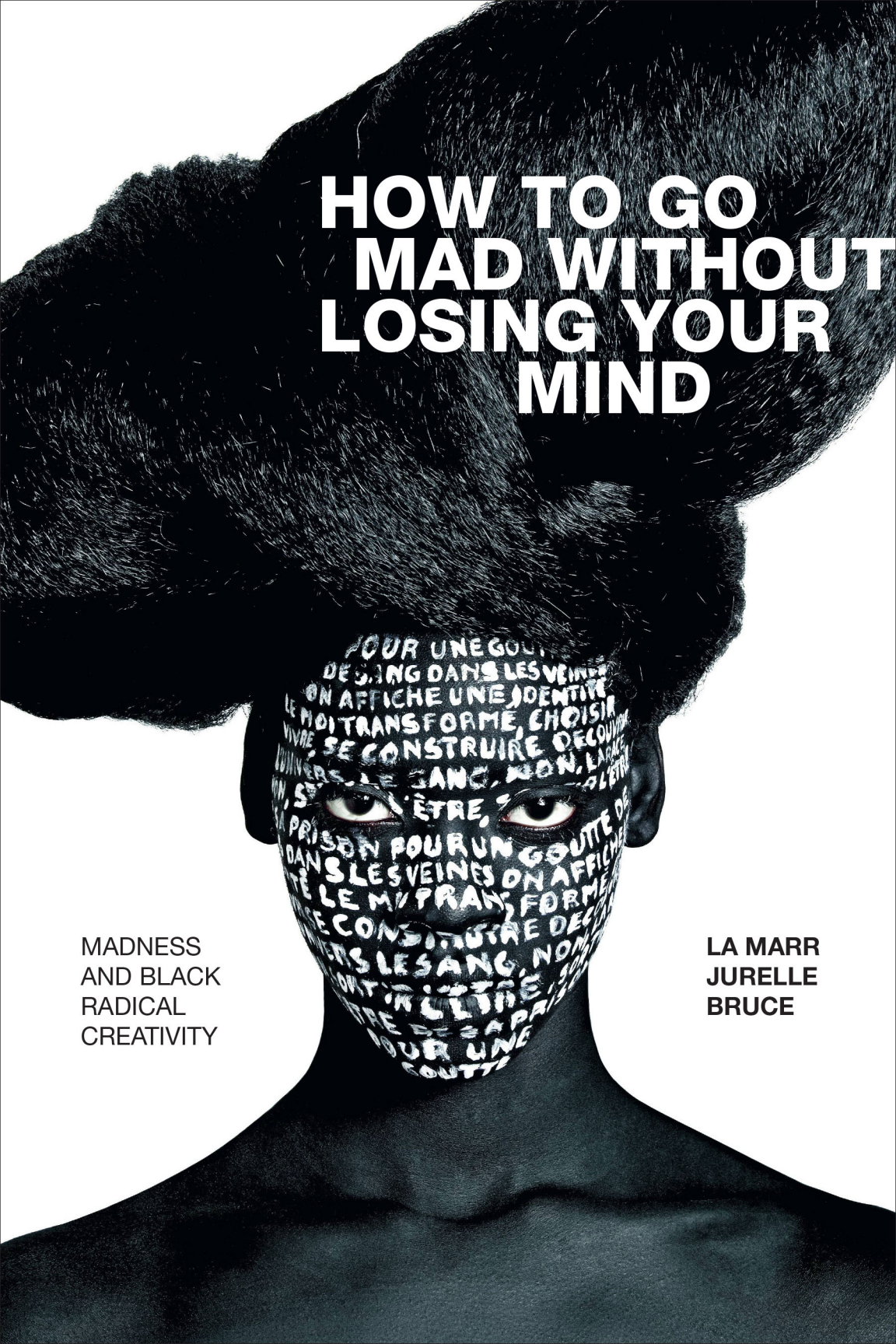


HOW TO GO MAD WITHOUT LOSING YOUR MIND

MADNESS
AND BLACK
RADICAL
CREATIVITY

LA MARR
JURELLE
BRUCE



HOW TO GO MAD
WITHOUT LOSING
YOUR MIND

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IN THE POETICS OF STUDY A SERIES
EDITED BY J. KAMERON CARTER
AND SARAH JANE CERVENAK

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LA MARR
JURELLE
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**HOW
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For

Eleanor Joyce Bruce (1941–2018)

and

David Anthony Hughes (1979–2020)

In love and madness, words fail—but I keep trying.

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God is good, life is brief, love is long, I am here, you are close, we are blessed, and it is done.

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CHAPTER ONE

MAD IS A PLACE

PRELUDE: THE SLAVE SHIP TOWS THE SHIP OF FOOLS

HOLD TIGHT. THE WAY TO GO MAD WITHOUT LOSING YOUR MIND IS SOMETIMES UNRULY. It might send you staggering across asylum hallways, heckled by disembodied voices—or shimmying over spotlit stages, greeted by loving applause. It might find you freewheeling through fever dreams, then marching toward freedom dreams, then scrambling from sleep, with blood and stars in your eyes, the whole world a waking dream.¹ But for now, we wade through a liquid void, among ominous ships, where this study begins.

The epigraphs above, supplied by the French philosopher Michel Foucault and the black feminist theorist Hortense Spillers, are our floating signposts. They point us to the intersection of a “fruitless expanse” and “nowhere at all”: an unmappable coordinate where a ship of fools crosses a slave ship, where imprisoned madness meets captive blackness in a stifling tightness

Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads, to the great uncertainty external to everything. He is the Passenger par excellence: that is, the prisoner of the passage. And the land he will come to is unknown—as is, once he disembarks, the land from which he comes. He has his truth and his homeland only in that *fruitless expanse* between two countries that cannot belong to him. —MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 1961

Those African persons in “Middle Passage” were literally suspended in the “oceanic.” . . . [R]emoved from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet “American” either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere at all*. —HORTENSE SPILLERS, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” 1987

through a groundless vastness. I shudder and flounder as I wonder: What vertigo does a body undergo, caught between treacherous waters below and treacherous captors above, with “nowhere” outside? How does it feel to be forcibly hauled across the sea while forcibly stagnated on the ship—to endure a cruelty in motion that is also a cruelty of stillness? What noise might ring out if the sound of a laughing “fool” joined the sound of a weeping “slave”—and would the weeper and the laughter commiserate? How does one keep time, or discern direction, or remember the way home from “nowhere at all,” with no familiar beacon to behold ahead or behind? It seems to me that neither imagination nor historiography is apt to apprehend the seasickness of spirit, the existential dread, and the feverish homesickness that might menace a mad prisoner or black captive trapped at sea.

An unimaginable scene may seem a strange place to launch a study of radical imagination. Likewise, a fruitless expanse makes a bleak backdrop for pondering the fruit of mad black creativity. And furthermore, unanswerable questions may sound odd opening a work of careful inquiry. But there are lessons to learn from those who make homeland in wasteland, freedom routes to chart that start in a ship’s hull, debris of mad and black life to retrieve from the sea, mad black worlds to make that rise from a ship’s wake, and questions that refuse answers but rouse movements.² Besides, if the anticolonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon is right, if there is “a zone of nonbeing . . . an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born,”³ then “nowhere at all” may be an especially auspicious place to commence. By beginning at this curious crossing, I also hope to orient the reader—which requires that I *disorient* the reader—for the errant, erratic routes to come. Remember that the way is sometimes unruly.

Those opening epigraphs are passages of prose conjuring cataclysmic passages of persons across temporal, spatial, and metaphysical gauntlets. In the first epigraph, Foucault chases a “ship of fools” as it crisscrosses early modern Europe. To have him tell it, ships of fools were fifteenth-century nautical vessels whose lunatic occupants were deemed nuisances to their communities, expelled from home, made wards of sailors, and consigned to those ships as they drifted along European rivers and seas. When Foucault declares that the mad seafarer has “his truth and his homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him,” the words evoke a *mad diaspora*: a scattering of captives across sovereign borders and over bodies of water; an upheaval and dispersal of persons flung far from home; and an emergence of

unprecedented diasporic subjectivities, ontologies, and possibilities that transgress national and rational norms.

To a scholar of black modernity, Foucault's account may ring uncannily familiar. It brings to my mind many millions of Africans abducted from their native lands by slave traders in the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries. These stolen people were stacked in the putrid pits of slave ships; made "prisoner of the passage" called the Middle Passage; uprooted from solid "truth" and stable "homeland"; drenched, instead, in oceanic uncertainty; dragged across a "fruitless expanse"; discharged onto a land that, arguably, "cannot belong to" them; and cast into restlessness and rootlessness that persist in many of their descendants.

In the second epigraph, Spillers describes the Passage, and her words bear repeating: "Removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet 'American' either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all." Some pessimists claim that the progeny of slaves are still not American, still vainly awaiting recognition as citizen and affirmation as human, still existentially captive, still suspended in that void.⁴ Wherever blackness dwells—slave ship, spaceship, graveyard, garden, elsewhere, everywhere—those captives accessed what Spillers calls a "richness of *possibility*."⁵ They would realize black diasporic kinesis, kinship, sociality, creativity, love, and myriad modes of being that flourish in their marvelously tenacious heirs. In a "fruitless expanse," the enslaved bore fruit. The pit held seeds, as pits sometimes do.

Both the ship of fools and the slave ship provoke historiographic dispute. Regarding the ship of fools, many historians insist that Foucault mistook an early modern literary and visual motif for a material vessel.⁶ As for the slave ship, it incites crises of calculation about the number of Africans who made it to *the other side*—by which I mean *the Americas* and/or/as *the afterlife*—and about the depth of the wound that the Middle Passage inflicts on modernity.⁷ Both ships defy positivist history: the ship of fools because it was likely unreal; the slave ship because it is so devastatingly real that it confounds comprehension, resists documentation, and spawns ongoing effects that belie the purported *pastness* of history. It is no wonder that when Spillers wanted to address the historical and ontological functions of the Middle Passage and its ripples across modernity, particularly black female modernity, she realized that "the language of the historian was not telling me what I needed to know."⁸ (Perhaps the language of the mad methodologist, who I will introduce shortly, can better speak to Spillers's concerns.) Spillers further characterizes the Middle Passage as a "dehumanizing, ungendering, and defacing project"—and I would

add *deranging* to that grave litany.⁹ To *derange* is to throw off, to cast askew, “to disturb the order or arrangement of” an entity.¹⁰ The Middle Passage literally deranged and threw millions of Africans askew across continents, oceans, centuries, and worlds.¹¹ I use *derange* also to signal how the Atlantic slave trade, and the antiblack modernity it inaugurated, framed black people as always already wild, subrational, pathological, mentally unsound, mad.

Although it is unlikely that a slave ship ever crossed a ship of fools in geographic space,¹² these vessels converged in the discursive domains and cultural imaginations of early Euromodernity. According to the era’s emergent anti-black and antimad worldviews, both of these ships were floating graveyards of the socially dead. Both ships were imagined to haul inferior, unReasonable beings who were metaphysically adrift amid the rising tide of Reason. For the purposes of this study, I distinguish *reason* (lowercase) from *Reason* (uppercase). The former, *reason*, signifies a generic process of cognition within a given system of logic and the “mental powers concerned with forming conclusions, judgments, or inferences.”¹³ Meanwhile, *Reason* is a proper noun denoting a positivist, secularist, Enlightenment-rooted episteme purported to uphold objective “truth” while mapping and mastering the world. In normative Western philosophy since the Age of Enlightenment, Reason and rationality are believed essential for achieving modern personhood, joining civil society, and participating in liberal politics.¹⁴ However, Reason has been entangled, from those very Enlightenment roots, with misogynist, colonialist, ableist, antiblack, and other pernicious ideologies. The fact is that female people, indigenous people, colonized people, neurodivergent people, and black people have been violently excluded from the edifice of Enlightenment Reason—with Reasonable doctrines justifying those exclusions.¹⁵

Regarding the hegemony of Reason, political theorist Achille Mbembe remarks that “it is on the basis of a distinction between reason and unreason (passion, fantasy) that late-modern criticism has been able to articulate a certain idea of the political, the community, the subject—or, more fundamentally, of what the good life is all about, how to achieve it, and, in the process, to become a fully moral agent. The exercise of reason is tantamount to the exercise of freedom.”¹⁶ While Mbembe names “passion” and “fantasy” as examples of “unreason,” a third entry belongs on this list: madness itself. If those late-modern critics claim that Reason is requisite for “becoming a fully moral agent,” they also imply the inverse—that unReason entails moral deficiency and ineptitude. (This is why throes of *passion*, flights of *fantasy*, and bouts of *madness* are thought inimical to one’s moral sense.) Meanwhile, if “late-modern criticism” insists that “the exercise of reason is tantamount to the exercise of freedom,”

it also insinuates the inverse—that the condition of unReason is commensurate with the condition of unfreedom. While Mbembe's point of reference is late modernity, Enlightenment-era philosophers like David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Jefferson, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel also asserted that unReasonable beings were suited for unfreedom, that the unReason of Africans ordained them for enslavement.¹⁷ Within white supremacist and antiblack master narratives that calcified in the eighteenth century, to be white-*cum*-rational was to inherit modernity's pantheon and merit freedom; to be black-*cum*-subrational was to be barred from modernity's favor and primed for slavery. The Euro-modern patriarch affirmed his Reason and freedom, in part, by casting the black African as his ontological foil, his unReasonable and enslaved Other.¹⁸

In staging this encounter between the slave ship and ship of fools, I do not intend to imply a simplistic analogy between the two. Rather, I want to suggest that the slave ship (icon of abject blackness) commandeers the ship of fools (icon of abject madness), tows the ship of fools, helps orient Western notions of madness and Reason, and helps propel this turbulent movement we call modernity.¹⁹

HOW TO GO MAD: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind roves the intersections of madness and radical creativity in black expressive culture, particularly African American expressive culture, since the twentieth century. In the chapters that follow, I seek the mad in the literatures of August Wilson, Amiri Baraka, Gayl Jones, Ntozake Shange, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Richard Wright; in the jazz repertoires of Buddy Bolden, Sun Ra, and Charles Mingus; in the comedic performances of Richard Pryor and Dave Chappelle; and in the protest music of Nina Simone, Lauryn Hill, Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, and Frank Ocean, among many other cultural producers and forms. In the works of these artists, madness animates—and sometimes agitates—black radical artmaking, self-making, and worldmaking. Moreover, madness becomes content, form, symbol, idiom, aesthetic, existential posture, philosophy, strategy, and energy in an enduring black radical tradition.

The *black* in this book's subtitle signifies a dynamic matrix of cultures, epistemologies, subjectivities, corporealities, socialities, and ontologies rooted in sub-Saharan African peoples and traveling in diasporic circuits and surges to the ends of the world. *Black* coalesced as a racial category amid the Atlantic

slave trade and the advent of global antiblackness—but blackness contains creative and insurgent power, on display in this study, far exceeding those wretched sites of origin and those cruel conditions of coalescence.

I do not typically capitalize *black* because I do not regard it as a *proper* noun. Grammatically, the proper noun corresponds to a formal name or title assigned to an individual, closed, fixed entity. I use a lowercase *b* because I want to emphasize an *improper* blackness: a blackness that is a “critique of the proper”;²⁰ a blackness that is collectivist rather than individualistic; a blackness that is “never closed and always under contestation”;²¹ a blackness that is ever-unfurling rather than rigidly fixed; a blackness that is neither capitalized nor propertized via the protocols of Western grammar; a blackness that centers those who are typically regarded as lesser and *lower cases*, as it were; a blackness that amplifies those who are treated as “minor figures,” in Western modernity.²² I appreciate that some use the big *B* to confer respect, signal gravitas, and indicate specificity. However, the impropriety of lowercase blackness suits me, and this mad black project, just fine. Besides, my minor *b* is replete with respect, gravitas, and specificity-in-collectivity, too; its smallness does not limit the infinite care it contains. As for the term *black radical creativity*, it signifies black expressive culture that imagines, manifests, and practices otherwise ways of doing and being—all while confounding dominant logics, subverting normative aesthetics, and eroding oppressive structures of power and feeling.²³

But what of *madness*? My critical account of madness in modernity proceeds from two premises. On the one hand, madness is a floating signifier and dynamic social construction that evades stable definition. On the other hand, or maybe in the same hand, madness is a lived reality that demands sustained attention. Accounting for these exigencies, I forward a model of madness that is theoretically agile enough to chase floating signifiers while ethically rooted enough to hold deep compassion for madpersons. Thus primed, I propose that madness encompasses at least four overlapping entities in the modern West.

First is *phenomenal madness*: an intense unruliness of mind—producing fundamental crises of perception, emotion, meaning, and selfhood—as experienced in the consciousness of the mad subject. This unruliness is not necessarily painful, nor is it categorically pleasurable; it may induce distress, despair, exhilaration, euphoria, and myriad other sensations. In elaborating this mode of madness, I favor a phenomenological attitude attuned to whatever presents itself to consciousness, including hallucinations and delusions that have no material basis. Most important, phenomenal madness centers the lived experience and first-person interiority of the mad subject, rather than, say, the diagnoses imposed by medical authority.

Such diagnoses are the basis of *medicalized madness*, the second category in this schema. Medicalized madness encompasses a range of “serious mental illnesses” and psychopathologies codified by the psy sciences of psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis. These “serious” conditions include schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, and the antiquated diagnosis of medical “insanity,” among others.²⁴ I label this category *medicalized madness*—emphasizing the suffix *-ize*, meaning *to become* or *to cause to become*—to signal that mental illness is a politicized process, epistemological operation, and sociohistorical construction, rather than an ontological given. (Consider this brief example: A psychiatric patient who perceives voices, with no empirically discernable outside source, might be diagnosed with schizophrenia. Modern Western psychiatry medicalizes and pathologizes this experience as “auditory hallucination.”²⁵ However, in another historical context or social milieu, such a sound might be regarded as, say, prophetic hearing, superhuman aurality, telepathic transmission, or merely an unremarkable sensory variation.²⁶ My point is that there is nothing inherently, ontologically, transhistorically pathological about hearing voices.)

Even forms of medicalized madness that are measurable in brain tissue physiology, neuroelectric currents, and other empirical criteria are infiltrated (and sometimes constituted) by sociocultural forces. The creation, standardization, collection, and interpretation of psychiatric metrics take place in the crucible of culture. Likewise, clinical procedures are designed and carried out by subjective persons embedded in webs of social relations. And furthermore, psychiatry is susceptible to ideology. Exploiting that susceptibility, various antiblack, proslavery, patriarchal, colonialist, homophobic, and transphobic regimes have wielded psychiatry as a tool of domination. Thus, acts and attributes such as insurgent blackness, slave rebellion, willful womanhood, anticolonial resistance, same-sex desire, and gender subversion have all been pathologized by Western psychiatric science.²⁷ Beyond these overt examples of hegemonic psychiatry, I want to emphasize that no diagnosis is innocently objective. No etiology escapes the touch and taint of ideology. No science is pure.²⁸

The third mode of madness is *rage*: an affective state of intense and aggressive displeasure (which is surely phenomenal, but warrants analytic distinction from the unruliness above). Black people in the United States and elsewhere have been subjected to heinous violence and degradation, but rarely granted recourse. Consequently, as singer-songwriter Solange Knowles reminds us, black people “got the right to be mad” and “got a lot to be mad about.”²⁹ Alas, when they articulate rage in American public spheres, black people are often

criminalized as threats to public safety, lampooned as angry black caricatures, and pathologized as insane. That latter process—the conflation of black anger and black insanity—parallels the Anglophone confluence of *madness* meaning anger and *madness* meaning insanity. In short, when black people get mad (as in *angry*), antiblack logics tend to presume they’ve gone mad (as in *crazy*).

The fourth and most capacious category in this framework is *psychosocial madness*: radical deviation from the *normal* within a given psychosocial milieu. Any person or practice that perplexes and vexes the psychonormative status quo is liable to be labeled *crazy*. The arbiters of psychosocial madness are not elite cohorts of psychiatric experts, but rather multitudes of avowedly Reasonable people and publics who abide by psychonormative common sense. Thus, psychosocial madness reflects how avowedly sane majorities interpellate and often denigrate difference. What I have already stated about medicalized madness can also be adapted to psychosocial madness: acts and attributes such as insurgent blackness, slave rebellion, willful womanhood, anticolonial resistance, same-sex desire, and gender subversion have all been ostracized as *crazy* by sane majorities who adhere to Reasonable common sense. Whereas phenomenal madness is an *unruliness of mind*, psychosocial madness is sometimes an *unruliness of will* that resists and unsettles reigning regimes of the normal.

In its psychosocial iteration, *madness* often functions as a disparaging descriptor for any mundane phenomenon perceived to be odd and undesirable. An unconventional hairstyle, unpopular political opinion, physical tic, indecipherable utterance, eccentric outfit, dramatic flouting of etiquette, apathy toward money and wealth, or experience of spiritual ecstasy might be coded as *crazy* in psychonormative discourse. Yet it seems to me that psychosocial madness reveals more about the avowedly sane society branding an object crazy than about the object so branded. When you point at someone or something and shout *Crazy!*, you have revealed more about yourself—about your sensibility, your values, your attentions, your notion of the normal, the limits of your imagination in processing dramatic difference, the terms you use to describe the world, the reach of your pointing finger, the lilt of your accusatory voice—than you have revealed about that supposedly mad entity.³⁰

These four categories are not all-encompassing and do not cover every possible permutation of madness. Furthermore, these four categories are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they often intersect and converge. *Rage*, for example, is always also *phenomenal*. Discourses of *medicalized* madness attempt to make sense of *phenomenal* symptoms and inevitably harbor *psychosocial* biases. Black people who articulate *rage* at unjust social conditions are often coded as

psychosocial others (and sometimes diagnosed as *medically* unsound). The spillage of these categories into one another reminds us that madness is too messy to be placed in tidy boxes and too restless to hold still for rigid frameworks.

Note, also, that these modes of madness might be taken up in manifold ways for mad praxis. For example, rage might be harnessed to fuel impassioned resistance. Medicalized madness might be deconstructed to expose and address the biases in psy sciences. Phenomenal madness might be documented to teach sane majorities about the lived experience of madness. Psychosocial alterity might model otherwise ways of knowing and being, beyond entrenched status quos. In these and other ways, the protagonists in this study get mad and go mad to convey and confront the violence, chaos, strangeness, ecstasy, wonder, aporia, paradox, and danger—in short, the phenomenal madness—suffusing racial modernity.

Beyond approaching madness as an object of analysis, *How to Go Mad* adapts madness as methodology. As I propose and practice it, *mad methodology* is a mad ensemble of epistemological modes, political praxes, interpretive techniques, affective dispositions, existential orientations, and ways of life.

Mad methodology seeks, follows, and rides the unruly movements of madness. It reads and hears *idioms of madness*: those purported rants, raves, rambles, outbursts, mumbles, stammers, slurs, gibberish sounds, and unseemly silences that defy the grammars of Reason. It historicizes and contextualizes madness as a social construction and social relation vis-à-vis Reason. It ponders the sporadic violence of madness in tandem and in tension with the structural violence of Reason. It cultivates critical ambivalence³¹ to reckon with the simultaneous harm and benefit that may accompany madness. It respects and sometimes harnesses “mad” feelings like obsession and rage as stimulus for radical thought and action. Whereas rationalism roundly discredits madpersons, mad methodology recognizes madpersons as critical theorists and decisive protagonists in struggles for liberation. To be clear, I am not suggesting that madpersons are always already agents of liberation. I am simply and assuredly acknowledging that they *can be*, which is a heretical admission amid antimad worlds. I propose a mad methodology that neither vilifies the madperson as evil incarnate, nor romanticizes the madperson as resistance personified, nor patronizes the madperson as helpless ward awaiting aid. Rather, mad methodology engages the complexity and variability of mad subjects.

Regarding anger, the warrior poet Audre Lorde asserts that it is “loaded with information and energy.”³² Mad methodology is rooted in the recognition that phenomenal madness, medicalized madness, and psychosocial madness, like angry madness, are all “loaded with information and energy.” Mad methodology

proceeds from a belief that such information can instruct black radical theory and such energy can animate black radical praxis.

Most urgently, mad methodology primes us to extend *radical compassion* to the madpersons, queer personae, ghosts, freaks, weirdos, imaginary friends, disembodied voices, unvoiced bodies, and unReasonable others, who trespass, like stowaways or fugitives, in Reasonable modernity. Radical compassion is a will to care for, a commitment to feel with, a striving to learn from, and an openness to be vulnerable before a precarious other, though they may be drastically dissimilar to yourself. Radical compassion is not an appeal to an idyllic oneness where difference is blithely effaced. Nor is it a smug projection of oneself into the position of another, thereby displacing that other.³³ Nor is it an invitation to walk a mile in someone else's shoes and amble, like a tourist, through their lifeworld, leaving them existentially barefoot all the while. Rather, radical compassion is an exhortation to ethically walk and sit and fight and build alongside another whose condition may be utterly unlike your own. Radical compassion works to impart care, exchange feeling, transmit understanding, embolden vulnerability, and fortify solidarity across circumstantial, sociocultural, phenomenological, and ontological chasms in the interest of mutual liberation. It persists even and especially toward beings who are the objects of contempt and condemnation from dominant value systems. It extends even and especially to those who discomfit one's own sense of propriety. Indeed, this book sometimes loiters in scenes and tarries with people who may trouble readers. I hope that this book also models the sort of radical compassion that persists through the trouble.

I characterize mad methodology as a parapositivist approach insofar as it resists the hegemony of positivism. (As a philosophical doctrine, positivism stipulates that meaningful assertions about the world must come from empirical observation and interpretation to generate veritable truth. However, when engaging the phenomenal, the spiritual, the aesthetic, the affective, and the mad, we must deviate from the logics of positivism.)³⁴ Mad methodology finds great inspiration in other cultural theorists' parapositivist approaches, including the Apostle Paul's account of "faith," Édouard Glissant's "poetics of relation," Avery Gordon's haunted and haunting sociology, Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," Jack Halberstam's "scavenger methodology," Ann Cvetkovich's compilation of an "archive of feelings," Christina Sharpe's "wake work," and Patricia J. Williams's "ghost gathering."³⁵ These thinkers study sublime, opaque, formless, subjunctive, scarce, dead, and ghostly phenomena that thwart positivist knowing.

As a parapositivist approach, mad methodology does not attempt to wholly, transparently reveal madness.³⁶ How could it? Madness, after all, resists

intelligibility and frustrates interpretation. Conceding that I cannot fully understand the meaning of every madness I encounter, I often precede my observations with the qualifiers *maybe*, *it might be*, and *it seems*. Between these covers, I embrace uncertainty and irresolution. I heed poet-philosopher Glissant's insistence that "the transparency of the Enlightenment is finally misleading. . . . It is not necessary to understand someone—in the verb 'to understand' [French: *comprendre*] there is the verb 'to take' [French: *prendre*]*—in order to wish to live with them.*"³⁷ I want to *live with* the madpersons gathered in this study, but I do not need or want to *take* them. I strive to *pursue* madness, but not to *capture* it. Recall that I began this chapter by warning you to *hold tight*. Mad methodology also, sometimes, entails *letting go*: relinquishing the imperative to know, to take, to capture, to master, to lay bare all the world with its countless terrors and wonders. Sometimes we must hold tight to steady ourselves amid the violent tumult of this world—and sometimes we must let go to unmoor ourselves from the stifling order imposed on this world. I am describing a deft dance between release and hold, hold and release.

In short, mad methodology is how to go mad without losing your mind. At length, this book will show you.

MAD INTERVENTIONS

How to Go Mad joins a robust corpus of post-2000 black studies scholarship exploring radical imagination within black popular culture, black feminist ingenuity, black queer art, the black avant-garde, Afrofuturism, Afrosurrealism, and beyond. I want to cite just a few entries in this scholarly corpus: In *Freedom Dreams* (2002), Robin Kelley illuminates black radical imagination and freedom dreaming in black abolitionist, Marxist, surrealist, and feminist movements across the diaspora.³⁸ Fred Moten's *In the Break* (2003) chronicles and practices a black radical tradition—animated by a will to resistance and propelled by a "freedom drive"—in twentieth-century performance and poetics.³⁹ Daphne Brooks's *Bodies in Dissent* (2006) explores mid-nineteenth- through early twentieth-century circumatlantic performances that spectacularize and instrumentalize alterity to disrupt racial and sexual hegemony.⁴⁰ In his "Afrosurreal Manifesto" (2009), D. Scott Miller taps into otherworldly fantasy, mystical visions, ecstatic feeling, and aesthetic extravagance in order to defy oppressive regimes of "reality."⁴¹ In *Wandering* (2014), Sarah Cervenak charts practices of (physical and metaphysical) wandering as black feminist strategies to evade the coercive constrictions of antiblackness, misogyny, and racial

capitalism.⁴² L. H. Stalling's *Funk the Erotic* (2015) theorizes black "funk" as a sensuous amalgam of erotic, ethical, and epistemological rebellion against antiblack, misogynist, capitalist, and sex-negative status quos.⁴³ *Radical Aesthetics and Modern Black Nationalism* (2016) is GerShun Avilez's study of the insurgent imaginations that propelled the Black Arts Movement, the fractures and ruptures that opened up within that movement, and its bustling queer afterlives and reincarnations.⁴⁴

While *How to Go Mad* is foremost in league with such black studies scholarship, this book also speaks to—and talks back to—Western canon-dwellers from antiquity through postmodernity. Indeed, to ponder the juncture of madness and art in the West is to join a conversation with preeminent storytellers and philosophers in the Eurocentric context.⁴⁵ For example, in *Phaedrus*, the Athenian philosopher Plato (writing in the guise of Socrates) suggests that Eros, prophecy, and poetry are forms of "divine madness."⁴⁶ Throughout his dramatic oeuvre, Elizabethan playwright William Shakespeare endows characters like King Lear, Hamlet, and Ophelia with madness that begets ingenuity, cunning, and revelation; regarding Hamlet, the character Polonius opines: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."⁴⁷ American gothic author Edgar Allan Poe writes that "the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence—whether much that is glorious—whether all that is profound—does not spring from disease of thought."⁴⁸ Nineteenth-century Eurocontinental philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche extols the revolutionary potential in madness, arguing that "almost everywhere [in Western history] it was madness which prepared the way for the new idea, which broke the spell of a venerated usage and superstition."⁴⁹ In perhaps the most influential study of madness in the West, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Foucault details the sequestering and silencing of madness in Euromodernity. He contends that Europe's ruling classes, religious leadership, and psychiatric authorities colluded to expel madness (itself a sort of epistemology, communicative mode, and wandering way of life) into physical confinement and existential exile.⁵⁰ In *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari find insurgent energy in schizophrenia, treating it as a locus of unruly, free-flowing desire that defies repressive incursions of capitalism and psychoanalysis.⁵¹

Clearly, the conjunction of madness and creativity is a common concern in Western culture writ large. However, that madness-creativity intersection is especially fraught and charged when occupied by black folks. This is because antiblack discourse constantly codes black people as savage, irrational, subrational, pathological, and effectively mad. Black artists must

contend with—and also can draw upon—these associations of blackness and madness interlaid with those broader associations of artistic genius and madness.

This project owes much to disability studies.⁵² Among that field's signal contributions is its interrogation of the *medical model* of disability, the dominant framework for understanding disability in the West. The medical model regards a disability as a physical or cognitive dysfunction residing in an individual body and/or mind—a dysfunction that should be corrected or cured by medical intervention. In contrast, disability studies advances a *social model*, contending that disability is a social construction: a set of social exclusions, obstructions, and derogations imposed on persons who diverge from a dominant, “abled” norm.⁵³ The medical and social models of disability roughly correspond to my medicalized and psychosocial iterations of madness. However, my own schema does not treat the medical and psychosocial as dichotomous; rather, I emphasize their entanglements and convergences.

Dominant discourses of “disability” tend to center the physical body, treating disabled people as “physically” feeble, infirm, *undercapacitated*. In contrast, normative notions of madness cast madpersons as dangerously *hypercapacitated*—that is, able and liable to do harm that sane persons could barely fathom, let alone act upon. Addressing such exigencies, the burgeoning field of mad studies centers the lived experience of madpersons—especially consumers, survivors, and ex-patients of psychiatric systems—and advances agendas for mad liberation. Brenda A. LeFrançois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume are the editors of *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (2013), the most extensive collection of writings in mad studies to date. In an introduction articulating a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and intersectional platform for mad studies, they write:

To work with and within the language of madness is by no means to deny the psychic, spiritual, and material pains and privations endured by countless people with histories of encounters with the psy disciplines. To the contrary, it is to acknowledge and validate these experiences as being authentically human, while at the same time rejecting clinical labels that pathologize and degrade; challenging the reductionistic assumptions and effects of the medical model; locating psychiatry and its human subjects within wider historical, institutional, and cultural contexts; and advancing the position that mental health research, writing, and advocacy are primarily about opposing oppression and promoting human justice.⁵⁴

I share their commitment to mad study that honors the personhood, lived experience, and agency of madpersons while recognizing the abjection that frequently haunts mad life. Like the editors of *Mad Matters*, I am invested in “promoting human justice”—alongside, I might add, relief, revelation, joy, and liberation—for madpersons and other psychosocial outcasts. However, I respectfully diverge from the editors’ quest, articulated later in their introduction, for a mad studies “steadfastly arrayed against biomedical psychiatry.”⁵⁵ While I decry the dire harm that biomedical psychiatry has wrought on many pathologized people, I also know that some patients and survivors find utility in it. To “validate and celebrate survivor experience and cultures,” as the editors rightly intend, we might sometimes cautiously, provisionally, ambivalently, improperly, subversively take up biomedical psychiatry—all while we pursue its radical transformation.⁵⁶

Another compendium of mad studies appears in “Mad Futures: Affect/Theory/Violence,” a 2017 special issue of the scholarly journal *American Quarterly*. Guest editors Tanja Aho, Liat Ben-Moshe, and Leon J. Hilton remark that the field of mad studies “draws on decades of scholarship and activism examining how psychiatric disabilities or differences must be understood not only as medical conditions but also as historical formations that have justified all manner of ill-treatment and disenfranchisement—even as they have also formed the basis for political identities, social movements, and cultural practices of resistance.”⁵⁷ In this passage, they note the multiplicity of madness, which is at once a “medical,” “historical,” “political,” “social,” and “cultural” formation. Furthermore, they acknowledge both the abjection that may beset madness and the insurgent energy that may emanate from it. Foundational to my own study is attention to madness as a complex and dynamic process that may entail both devastating abjection and mighty agency.

This complexity is illustrated in the juxtaposition of two common figures of speech: *to snap* and *to click*. In Anglophone idiom, *to snap* is to break, to come undone, to lose control, to go crazy; *to click* is to come together, to fall into place, to make sense. Much as the sounds of physical snaps and physical clicks are sometimes indistinguishable to the ear, the processes signified in these idioms are sometimes indistinguishable to critical interpretation. As this book reveals, sometimes coming undone is precisely how one falls into place. Sometimes a breakdown doubles as a breakthrough. Sometimes a snap is a click. *Sometimes*. I recognize and reckon with occasions where madness entails pain, danger, terror, degradation, and harm for those who experience it

and those in its vicinity. But I hasten to mention that Reason may entail pain, terror, abjection, and harm, too. In fact, far more modern harm has been perpetrated under the aegis of Reason—I have in mind chattel slavery, colonialism, imperialism, genocide, war, and other evils both momentous and mundane—than committed by rogue madpersons.⁵⁸

As we work to destigmatize madness, including the medicalized madness of mental illness, it is crucial that we resist romanticizing it. Feminist bioethicist and disability studies scholar Elizabeth Donaldson warns that “the madness-as-feminist-rebellion metaphor might at first seem like a positive strategy for combating the stigma traditionally associated with mental illness. However, this metaphor indirectly diminishes the lived experience of many people disabled by mental illness.”⁵⁹ Indeed, the “madness-as-feminist-rebellion metaphor” risks evacuating madness of its lived complexity in order to flatten and polish it into a shiny political badge. Whereas Donaldson admonishes against abstracting madness into a positive symbol, psychiatrist Robert Barrett critiques how madness is reduced to a negative sign. He suggests that schizophrenia is co-opted to “represent symbolically much of what has gone wrong in the modern world,” forcing schizophrenic people to bear “the responsibility of representing an alienated, fragmented, meaningless, self-absorbed society—a schizophrenic society.”⁶⁰ While simplistic metaphors may be rhetorically expedient, they come at grave ethical cost if they distort and objectify people. With these cautions in mind, I center representations of madness that illuminate, rather than efface, its lived experience.

No matter how carefully I qualify my mobilization of madness, and despite my work to avoid romanticizing it, this study might incite the ire of a cohort I call *rationalist readers*. Analogous to the moral reader hailed in slave narratives and sentimental novels, the rationalist reader—and more broadly, the rationalist audience—is the presumed paradigmatic consumer of psychonormative culture. Such a reader possesses psychonormative sensibilities, adheres to Reason’s common sense, and shuns madness as categorically detrimental. Some rationalist readers may fear that my focus on mad blackness reinforces myths of black savagery and undermines the “respectable” project of Reasonable blackness. The latter project puts faith in Reason, a structure that I approach with well-warranted suspicion (and perhaps paranoia). Rather than integrate black people into the pantheon of Reason, or seek a place for them at its hallowed table, I want to interrogate the logics that undergird that pantheon and prop up that table. I am especially interested in artists who refuse to have a seat, but would rather flip the table and carry their meals outside.

DRAPETOMANIACAL SLAVES AND REBELS (OR, MAD BLACK MOVEMENTS)

Some of those black captives in slave ships resolved to go outside, too.⁶¹ They leapt from the decks of those vessels and into the Atlantic Ocean, choosing biological death over the wretchedness that sociologist Orlando Patterson deems “social death.”⁶² Typically, psychiatry labels such leaps *suicide* and pathologizes them as the outcome of absolute self-abnegation. While the frame of psychopathology is apt for apprehending why some people take their own lives, it cannot hold all those Flying Africans. Amid the misery of the Middle Passage, suicidal ideation might be a mode of radical dreaming, an urge to escape to a distant elsewhere in an afterlife, otherworld, ancestral gathering place, heaven, or home. For the captive on the ship, suicide might be an act of radical self-care, intended to relieve and leave the hurt of the hold and expedite arrival in that elsewhere.⁶³ Sometimes the leap was not a plummet to doom, but a launch into flight; not an outcome of self-abnegation, but an act of self-assertion; not a bog of hopelessness, but an outburst of radical hope hurled into another world. To be clear, I do not glibly romanticize suicide; I know and ardently assert that each life is sacred, singular, precious, miraculous, and should be treated with ineffable care. At the same time, I acknowledge that there are conditions of unbearable duress where taking one’s own life might be a critical and ethical act—albeit dreadful and woeful, too. *How to Go Mad* attends to people and practices who, like those Flying Africans, will not be captured by normative Reason.

By the nineteenth century, the slave ship gave way to the plantation as the paradigmatic site of black abjection and confinement in the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, the ship of fools, if it ever existed, was succeeded by the prison house and later the asylum as the preferred receptacle for the allegedly insane.⁶⁴ Amid these shifts, the association of blackness and madness remained. In antebellum America, that association manifested in the similar logics used to justify the plantation and the asylum. Literary and cultural historian Benjamin Reiss writes that “both institutions revoked the civil liberties of a confined population in the name of public order and the creation of an efficient labor force, and both housed a purportedly subrational population . . . with the asylum’s triumph over madness paralleling the white race’s subduing of the black.”⁶⁵ The plantation and asylum were forums in which arbiters of antebellum Reason rehearsed methods of domination and developed logics of justification.

I want to linger at the site of the asylum to highlight the salience of space and movement in modern notions of madness. Within Anglophone idiom,

subjects *go* crazy, as though mad is a place or constellation of places. The ship of fools, the insane asylum, the psychiatric hospital, the carnival, the wrong side of the supposed line between genius and madness, and even the continent of Africa are frequently mapped as mad places within Western discourse. It is as though madness is a metaphysical zone, a location outside the gentrified precincts and patrolled borders of Reason. Or maybe madness is a mode of motion occasioned in treacherous terrain: a wavering, trembling, swelling, zig-zagging, brimming, bursting, shattering, or splattering movement that disrupts Reason's supposedly steady order and tidy borders. It seems to me that madness, like diaspora, is both location and locomotion. Madness, like diaspora, is both place and process.⁶⁶ Madness and diaspora transgress normative arrangements—of the sane and sovereign, in turn.

The transgressive motion of fugitive slaves was framed as madness-as-kinesis by proslavery psychiatry. In 1851, the prominent Confederate physician Samuel Cartwright coined *drapetomania*, which he described as “the disease causing Negroes to run away.”⁶⁷ As formulated by Cartwright, drapetomania is a racialized diagnosis that exclusively afflicts “Negroes”—as-slaves, reflecting an antiblack antebellum insistence on conflating *blackness* and *slaveness*.⁶⁸ Of course, this discursive conflation was allied with the material, legal, and existential yoking of blackness and slaveness in chattel slavery.

Cartwright further argues that “the cause in the most of cases, that induces the negro to run away from service, is as much a disease of the mind as any other species of mental alienation, and much more curable, as a general rule.” He suggests that drapetomania can be cured if the slaveholder upholds a dual role as disciplinarian master (with use of the whip, so that slaves will fearfully obey) and paternalistic protector (so that slaves will be made agreeable by bonds of affection and the incentive of protection).⁶⁹ In pathologizing black self-emancipation, Cartwright joins a proslavery, antiblack conspiracy against black freedom: antiblack slave codes criminalized black freedom; antiblack religion demonized black freedom; antiblack philosophy stigmatized black freedom; and antiblack slaveholders and vigilantes terrorized black freedom. It is no wonder, then, that antiblack medicine would pathologize black freedom. Under the obscene regime and episteme of antebellum slavery, black freedom was crime, sin, stigma, liability, and sickness, too.

Whereas drapetomania supposedly compelled black people to flee servitude, Cartwright coined another psychopathology to ail them once they found freedom. He writes that “Dysaesthesia Aethiopica is a disease peculiar to negroes, affecting both mind and body. . . . [I]t prevails among free negroes, nearly all of whom are more or less afflicted with it, that have not got some

white person to direct and to take care of them.” Cartwright claims that black people are constitutionally unfit for freedom, sickened by it, and that they are mentally and physically healthier when enslaved. To have Cartwright tell it, the motley symptoms of dysaesthesia aethiopica include cognitive decline, lethargy, lesions, and skin insensitivity. In a flourish of melodramatic antiblackness, he decrees that to “narrate [dysaesthesia aethiopica’s] symptoms and effects among them would be to write a history of the ruins and dilapidation of Hayti, and every spot of earth they have ever had uncontrolled possession over for any length of time.”⁷⁰ He names the first free black republic as ground zero in a sort of hemispheric epidemic of dysaesthesia aethiopica. If mad is a place, according to Cartwright, it might be “Hayti.”⁷¹

The notion that slavery was salutary for black people also infused antebellum political rhetoric. John C. Calhoun, an eminent nineteenth-century politician whose career included stints as US Secretary of State and US Vice President, offered this justification for antiblack chattel slavery circa 1840: “Here is proof of the necessity of slavery. The African is incapable of self-care and sinks into lunacy under the burden of freedom. It is a mercy to him to give him the guardianship and protection from mental death.”⁷² Calhoun claims that freedom will careen Africans into lunacy, into a helpless and mindless oblivion that he deems “mental death.” If slavery was social death and freedom was mental death, those Africans were caught in a deadly double bind—doomed one way or another. Within the wicked machinations and pernicious logics of antebellum antiblackness, black people, whether enslaved or free, were the living dead.

Beyond *discursive* conflations of blackness and madness, slavery induced *lived* convergences of blackness and madness. It perpetrated systematic trauma, induced mental distress, and ignited crises of subjectivity—which is to say, it produced phenomenal madness—in black people both enslaved and free. Regarding black women in colonial and antebellum America, for example, Nobel laureate and novelist Toni Morrison explains that “black women had to deal with post-modern problems in the nineteenth century and earlier. . . . Certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability. Certain kinds of madness, deliberately going mad in order, as one of the characters [from the novel *Beloved*] says, ‘in order not to lose your mind.’ These strategies for survival made the truly modern person. They’re a response to predatory Western phenomena.”⁷³ Morrison suggests that “going mad” was sometimes a strategy to doggedly clutch hold of one’s mind when Reason would steal or smash it. If Reason is benefactor of white supremacy, proponent of antiblack slavocracy, and underwriter of patriarchal dominion, an enslaved

black woman might fare better by going insane instead. Rather than remain captive behind the barbed fences of slavocratic sanity, she might find refuge—however tenuous, vexed, and incomplete—in the fugitivity of madness.

Morrison fleshes out these themes in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved* (1987). The story is inspired by the life of Margaret Garner, a fugitive from slavery who escaped a Kentucky plantation with her family in 1856 and settled in the neighboring “free” state of Ohio. When slave catchers (authorized by the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act to legally stalk and abduct black persons living in “free” states) apprehended Garner, she attempted to kill her four children rather than see them repossessed into slavery. Like the Flying Africans, Garner preferred biological death over social death and sought the former for her children to spare them the latter. She succeeded in killing only her two-year-old daughter, Mary.

Margaret Garner is the basis for the novel’s primary protagonist, Sethe, while Mary is inspiration for the novel’s titular character, Beloved. As narrated in the story, Sethe goes mad in order to perform a killing that is utterly unconscionable within nearly every model of motherhood. And yet, her deed is also an astonishing, unflinching, unconditional attempt at motherly protection; she intends to save her sons and daughters from enslavement by any means, at any cost. In the moment before the killing, Sethe has a breakdown that feels like beating wings and probing beaks:

She was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher’s hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there.⁷⁴

Sethe originally sought sanctuary in an “over there” north of the Ohio River, but its freedom proved ephemeral and illusory. Now she seeks freedom in a more distant “over there,” in an otherworldly elsewhere outside the jurisdiction of fugitive slave laws and beyond the reach of a slaveholder called “schoolteacher.”⁷⁵ The man who reigns over the Kentucky plantation that Sethe fled, schoolteacher is an atrocious agent of antiblack Reason. He proposes that black people are inhuman, and he methodically tortures and dehumanizes them in order to fabricate tautological proof of his claim. He commits merciless

cruelty under the auspices of Reasonable inquiry and scientific method. When he arrives in Ohio to find Sethe in a shed covered in the blood of her dead child, slain only moments before, schoolteacher resolves against re-enslaving her and her offspring. His decision does not appear to be an act of compassion upon beholding that dreadful scene. He seems, instead, to be driven by economic calculation: the family is damaged goods unworthy of repossession.⁷⁶ Schoolteacher also appears to judge infanticide as an especially base depravity, unaware or unconcerned that his own evil is what drives the mother to kill her child. After all, Sethe's infanticidal madness is a desperate attempt to escape schoolteacher's genocidal Reason.

Twenty-five years before Garner's tragedy, another enslaved person's violent defiance and alleged madness attracted far greater notoriety in the US public sphere. Nathaniel Turner was a self-avowed prophet who claimed that divine inspiration led him to organize a bloody revolt in Southampton, Virginia, in 1831. Turner and his co-conspirators massacred some sixty local white people and incited horror in countless others. After his capture, while confined in jail and awaiting execution, Turner supposedly dictated his account of the insurrection to his court-appointed counsel, Thomas Gray. In the resulting document, "The Confessions of Nat Turner: The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA," Turner purportedly confesses the following about the weeks before the uprising: "Many were the plans formed and rejected by us, and it affected my mind to such a degree, that I fell sick, and the time passed without our coming to any determination how to commence."⁷⁷ This unspecified sickness resulted from the anxiety of devising revolt, of plans proposed and rejected, of apocalyptic dreams deferred, which "affected" his mind. It seems that Turner is describing mental illness and distress.

If Turner's own language implies mental illness, Gray charges madness outright. He deems Turner "a gloomy fanatic" and refers to his "dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind."⁷⁸ It comes as no surprise that Gray would label Turner mad. Turner committed the most severe violations of slavery's psychosocial status quo: he rejected the subjection demanded of slaves and chose bloody insurrection instead. More curiously, Gray opines that Turner "is a complete fanatic, or plays his part most admirably. On other subjects he possesses an uncommon share of intelligence, with a mind capable of attaining any thing; but warped and perverted by the influence of early impressions."⁷⁹ The possession of "a mind capable of attaining any thing" is commensurate with modern notions of genius. Remarkably, then, the deadliest slave insurrectionist in the history of the antebellum United States was a self-proclaimed *prophet*, an alleged *madman*, and, in Gray's estimation, a perverse *genius*. The prophet, madper-

son, and genius all occupy epistemic alterity. Because of the prophet's access to heaven's revelations, the madperson's exile from the domain of Reason, and the genius's elevation above ordinary intelligence curves, all three of these figures inhabit spheres of mind supposedly inaccessible to normal-minded masses. As portrayed in "Confessions," Turner traverses a genius | prophet | madman triptych, partitioned by those proverbially thin lines that separate madness from genius and lunacy from prophecy.

Gray also suggests that Turner could be pretending all along, "play[ing] his part most admirably." The implication is that Turner might be feigning insanity to elicit mercy or strike fear in his punishers. Fifty years later, Nietzsche would write that those "irresistibly drawn to throw off the yoke of any kind of morality and to frame new laws had, *if they were not actually mad*, no alternative but to make themselves or pretend to be mad."⁸⁰ Whether or not this characterization applies to Turner, it alerts us to another use of madness: as equipment for dissemblance. As this study will show, some crazy persons exploit the inscrutability of madness to use it as mask, cloak, and shield.

BLACK RADICAL MADNESS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I have surveyed several discursive confluences, historical intersections, and phenomenal convergences of madness and blackness in early modern through antebellum contexts. Now I turn to a few key expressions and theorizations of black radical madness in the twentieth century.

The figure of the "crazy nigger"⁸¹ swaggered prominently in African American vernacular imagination at the dawn of the twentieth century, the period that historian Rayford Logan labels the "nadir" of (postslavery) US race relations.⁸² The "crazy nigger" is an outlaw persona who does as he or she pleases, who is reckless, defiant, courageous, and profane, who flagrantly flouts codes of middle-class respectability and racial propriety. Whereas Reasonable people are chastened by fear of violence, stigma, and death, the "crazy nigger" seems undaunted by such concerns. He or she will fearlessly face any adversary—including powerful white racists—and thus emerges as a superlative representative of insurgent blackness.

The "crazy nigger" was a polarizing figure among black people in the nadir: a folk hero or villain depending upon the perspective of his or her beholder. He or she was a hero to those who sought a model of black defiance—providing vicarious wish fulfillment for black people who dreamed of, but never acted upon, revenge fantasies against antiblack racists. These would-be avengers

might utter the phrase *crazy nigger* like an honorific. On the other hand, this mad figure would be viewed as a nuisance by those invested in placating whiteness and aligning with bourgeois respectability. To such avowedly respectable persons, the “crazy nigger” was a liability for the race, a dangerous rabble-rouser stoking racial antagonism and courting racist retribution. From the mouths of these conformists, the words *crazy nigger* might sound like an invective. What I want to emphasize is that black vernacular cultures recognized and theorized the political resonance of craziness, deploying the term *crazy nigger* to describe agents of rebellion.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, black studies trailblazer William Edward Burghardt Du Bois also theorized a sort of racialized madness. In his 1903 tome *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois famously describes “double consciousness”: “one ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”⁸³ Double consciousness entails internecine “warring” in mind that might resemble the psychic unruliness and crisis I call phenomenal madness. Whereas the condition is often regarded as an existential affliction and impairment, I want to emphasize that it is also an endowment. Double consciousness grants black Americans a perceptual aptitude and epistemic access unavailable to their white counterparts. To live with this split subjectivity is to behold the spectacular scene of America’s black-white racial drama while also privy to the backstage content of black life, full of complex socioracial phenomena concealed from white gazes. Thus, for all of the existential angst it entails, double consciousness might also serve as an instrument for insurgency: a scopic tool and radar technology to secretly seek black horizons of being that are hidden from white surveillance.

Other prominent antiracist and anticolonial theorists centered madness in their accounts of black suffering and black insurgency in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1941, amid world war, anticolonial foment, and Pan-African awakenings, the Négritude critic and theorist Suzanne Roussy Césaire intervened in the discourse of madness and space. In a letter to the surrealist magazine *View*, she refuses to characterize madness as a pit of abjection; rather, she imagines “the domain of the strange, the Marvelous, and the fantastic,” wherein lies “the freed image, dazzling and beautiful, with a beauty that could not be more unexpected and overwhelming. Here are the poet, the painter, and the artist, presiding over the metamorphoses and the inversions of the world under the sign of hallucination and madness.”⁸⁴ Césaire’s domain of the Marvelous blooms at the crossroads of a surrealist rebuke of rationalism, an antico-