

Written Seduction:

An Exploration of Narratives of Madness within the Community of the Crazy

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PART 2

This paper is a continuation of the discussion originating in the text *Geography of Crazy Madness: A Historical Mapping of Crazy and an Exploration of Resistance in Counter Narratives from the Crazed* (Jane-Pedersen, 2013). In *Geography of Crazy Madness*, constructions of madness are explored over a historical linear framework. With the foundational elements of historical and modern constructions of madness gathered from that body of work, I will further the conversation started there.

In this paper I aim to construct a conversation that explores literary expression of madness, primarily narratives of madness as they have been heavily integrated into the psycho-behavioral discourse and treatment discourses. Current understandings of narratives of madness are often constructed in a linear format privileging a recovery structure that denotes the journey from illness to sanity.

Intro:

Narratives of madness have traditionally been constructed similarly to illness narratives: expressions about or around the experience of being ill. Illness narratives as identified by Arthur W. Frank (1993). Frank proposed that there are three main narratives within illness narratives: the *restitution* narrative, the *chaos* narrative and the *quest* narrative. Extending the categories of narratives posed by Frank (1993), we have the tools to explore the function, positionality and power of narratives within the lives of those within the community of crazy: which is, those who have been diagnosed as mentally ill, those who self-identify as crazy and those who ascribe to the community of crazy.

Restitution narratives as defined by Frank most closely resemble dominant constructions of narratives of madness. They are constructed within a linear format, privileging a 'recovered'

state in which the writer is speaking from. These narratives usually follow a formulaic construction of madness to sanity with emphasis on markers such as treatments, intrinsic values and strength, medical or chemical intervention and psycho-behavioral talk therapy. The positionality of the reader supports investments in dominant deficit perceptions of madness and privileging of sane or 'rational' ways of knowing and seeing the world. Restitution narratives are predominantly found in psycho-behavioral settings as they reinforce power systems and 'treatments' of the crazed by constructing a linear timeline of evidence that supports the interventions used within psycho-behavioral therapeutic settings.

Quest narratives generally refer to the narratives of illness or madness that can be seen as a journey to a 'healthy' version of oneself. Seeing the journey as an important factor or characteristic of becoming more valuable or healthy, meaning is created within the narrative of the journey rather than only the positionality of sane and mad.

Lastly, the chaos narrative often referred to as the anti-narrative. This narrative is told within embodied experiences of chaos. This narrative is often 'fragmented', disjointed and 'incoherent' to the singular reading through a dominant 'rational' lens. Many argue that this is type of narrative is invalid because of it is counter to linear construction and dominant beliefs, that one cannot create a narrative of madness or illness without being able to adequately reflect upon a dominant understanding of historical events. Being able to reflect is based upon the contingency of sanity; one cannot reflect or perceive the world correctly if one is crazy. Thus narratives of madness from a standpoint of madness are inherently inauthentic, inaccurate, and worthless because they do not serve to support or maintain the dominant understandings of madness.

Alison Torn (2011) furthers this conversation by utilizing a Bakhtin's concept of chronotope which, Bakhtin redefined for the literary community to identify the method by which literature represents time and space. Bakhtin "examines the different ways in which time and space are represented in the narrative, revealing not only the temporal complexities of the narrative structure, but also, through Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability, the meaning of the embodied phenomenological dimension of the lived experience"(Torn, 2011, p.130).

Torn utilizes Frank's identification of three types of narratives of illness that was previously stated with the extension of chronotopes as an analytic tool. It is important to be cognizant of the limitations of illness narrative models upon the narratives of madness as they overshadow "the complex phenomenological temporalities of people's experiences, often to the exclusion of the incoherent narratives of those experience psychological distress"(p.131). Torn is identifying that the chaos narratives, often the narratives that are incoherent, are often dismissed using illness narratives as a framework model.

Anti-narrative or chaos narrative is often devalued due to the lack of linear construction and culturally unrecognizable as narratives because they do not fit the dominant perceptions of narratives. Torn identifies that chaos narratives are described as having "narrative impoverishment...which suggests that narratives of madness are essentially lacking in some way"(p.131). Torn does not see narrative impoverishment as necessarily equating narrative loss but rather as a "disruption to the conventional narrative form which...is linked to loss of selfhood"(p.131). Thus narratives that are compared against resituated narratives are found to be deficient in essential elements of a narrative. This lacking or deficit of linear construction and coherence is where I will chose to explore the dangers and trauma that is constructed,

experienced and enacted upon when only resituated forms of narratives are accepted as authentic forms of narratives of madness.

By rejecting and devaluing counter narratives of madness; histories, experiences, lives, identities and the community of the crazed are effectively silenced and erased. Resituated narratives of madness have earned a space within the dominant discourse of madness and research efforts to understand madness. I argue that the privileging of dominant narratives and research regarding madness valuing only resituated narratives is extremely detrimental and violent to the community of the crazed.

Experiences, histories and identities are being dismissed and devalued within these spaces, which leads to psycho-social constructions of madness that perpetuates discriminatory and oppressive understanding of madness while efficiently silencing the voices of the mad and eradicating identities, histories and the culture of madness from dominant spaces.

Next, I will explore the detrimental and violent effects of narratives of madness upon the histories and voices of the mad, then I will explore ways in which we can honor the voices, lives and community of the mad by expansion of ‘horizontal limitations’ of conception of madness and narratives of madness to include a more inclusive understanding of what narratives of madness means.

Current Constructions of Narratives of Madness:

Though “definitions and treatments of mental illness change across time and culture”(Connor-Greene, 2006, p.6), narratives of madness have had a extensive historical relationship with psycho-behavioral ‘treatments’ of mental illness. Narratives of madness have an investment in identifying characteristics such as linear construction, coherence, written manifestations of ‘rational’ environmental interpretation, and movement from illness to recovery.

These narratives of madness which are invested in dominant perceptions of madness are not only counter to the discourse of crazy but are traumatic to the ways in which the crazed process and understand their world. Resituated narratives silence the language of the crazed and devalue the navigation and strategic survival strategies employed by the crazed to navigate, sometimes contradictory, borderland spaces.

Resituated narratives of madness privilege a resolution based linear auto-biographical construction of historical events that construct a timeline of madness and trajectory towards 'healing' in the dominant psycho-behavioral construction of sanity. Privileged elements are centered around how the psycho-behavioral community terms as 'interventions'. The rhetoric or meaning that is drawn simply from the term 'interventions' implies a sense of emergency, dangerousness and necessity of external involvement.

These interventions are primarily categorized as: chemical, behavioral or therapeutic, institutionalization, and correctional. Functions of dominant narratives of madness and interventions can be seen as discursive tools to keep the crazed oppressed and marginalized as well as to maintain power status positions of dominant 'sane' groups. By limiting the value and authenticity of various narratives to the dominant views of autobiographical narratives of madness, the community and ways of knowing of the crazed are not only silenced but also positioned for strategic erasure. One prevailing agent of erasure is the privileging of linear construction, which censors the ability to express multiple ways of knowing, and devalues the nonlinear, non-resolution perspectives of the crazed.

Linear construction of narratives

"In the parallel universe the laws of physics are suspended. What goes up does not necessarily come down, a body at rest does not tend to stay at rest, and not every action can be counted on to provoke an equal and opposite reaction. Time, too, is different. It may run in circles, flow

backward, skip about from now to then. The very arrangement of molecules is fluid. Tables can be clocks; faces, flowers.

--Susana Kayson, *Girl Interrupted*

Kayson explores the space of the crazed, an internal world experienced by one and shared by many. Though crazy is intimate and personal to the experiences of the crazed, crazy as a discourse is collectively constructed. Mutually understood through membership of the community of the crazed by shared narratives of embodied experiences of madness, oppression and violence in response to being mad.

Susana explores that the 'rules' of the world of madness are not the same for the 'rational' world, thus the constraints of 'rational' narratives of madness used in psycho-behavioral dominant therapeutic treatment settings are more detrimental and harmful than helpful in honoring the ways in which the mad see their world.

Caruth (1996) states, "The possibility that reference is indirect and that consequently we may not have direct access to others', or even our own, histories, seems to imply the impossibility of access to other cultures and hence of any means of making political or ethical judgments"(p.10). When making ethical or political judgments regarding the authenticity and legitimacy of a narrative is difficult if not almost impossible to accurately interpret when analyzing another culture without severe damage. Caruth furthers this discussion by saying "I would propose that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential....We can understand that a reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not"(p.11). Caruth powerfully identifies important aspects of honoring memories, histories and narratives, the ability to make space within our own 'horizontal limitations' to honor other ways of knowing. This also reflects an imperative

limitation within our own understands, the inability to honor simultaneous living within multiple spaces or realities.

We have been conditioned to privilege one way of knowing, when we all have multiple ways of knowing. This causes a damaging dissonance not only cognitively but also within our construction of our identities, roles and values. Caruth (1996) explores ways that stories are constructed and histories are betrayed—moral betrayal: found in the erasure of a history through the denial of its authenticity. In denying the authenticity of crazed accounts of madness, is essentially an erasure of that person, their ways of knowing and their community of the crazed.

Borderlands of the Crazed

“Crazy isn't being broken or swallowing a dark secret. It's you or me amplified”
— Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted*

Borderlands of the crazed have unique qualities: time and space is ‘torn’, there are multiple and often simultaneous stimulus or worlds being experienced at once. Reality construction is flexible and transient—nothing is ever static. Being able to understand and honor crazy ways of knowing is imperative to honoring the narrative constructions of crazy.

I will utilize ‘fractured space’ as identifying the multiple and simultaneous occupation of multiple worlds. That this simultaneous occupation of layered worlds influences the ways of knowing each individual person navigates. The past and present do not have a linear timeline but rather a layered timeline in which the past is never static but ever-present. Experiences, actors, environmental stimuli are not a reflective elements; rather history/memories are a living participant of ones current understanding. Histories are parallel, concurrent with experiences of instantaneous reality.

The narrative that is constructed today, will not be the same narrative read tomorrow, a narrative much like a memory will be reconstructed within every hearing, reading or

understating. Caruth asks, “what do the dying bodies of the past...have to do with the living bodies of the present?”(1996, p.26) What Caruth asks is poignant because it honors the actors of the past as dying or in transition from one form to the next while identifying that there is a relationship between the bodies of the past and the bodies of the present, that there is not a departure between them but rather an instrumental relationship.

Future Trajectory:

How can memory be honored in the aim to honor histories? As previously mentioned, memory is much like history in the community of the crazed. Memory and histories are living participants to the experiences of everyday ‘realities’. Disruptions within histories such as: ‘mental illness’ episodes, trauma, and interventions, interrupt the delicate construction of life and reorganize how one perceives their worlds. This also lends to the argument that linear constructions of narratives of madness are dangerous and harmful. To honor memory rather than dominant historical linear timelines, or the ‘real’, is to honor crazy ways of knowing and the community of the crazed.

Hesford and Kozol (2001) ask, how representations of the ‘real’ have been used in different historical moments to construct hierarchies within communities, to silence the views of oppressed groups, or conversely, how ideologies of truth and authenticity are used by marginalized groups to contest dominant narratives and to stimulate resistance”(p.3). By devaluing and dishonoring the memories and histories of the crazy, their narratives, histories and experiences have been discredited and eradicated. Caruth furthers this by saying “to be reasonable here is no longer to cling madly to the memory”(p.32). Caruth explores the dominant investment in historical memory rather than individual memory.

What is a narrative if it is not a memory, a retelling of a memory? I assert that there are many kinds of memory, though for the purpose of this paper I will explore three types of memory: individual memory, collective memory and social memory. Individual memory refers to the memories that are created by an individual that are unique to the individual due to the influences of their own histories, previous memories, experiences, funds of knowledge and investments in various discourses. Collective memory refers to a memory or memories that are constructed and adopted by many people within a community of practice or have a shared investment within that particular memory construction. A collective memory can be *read* differently by the individuals within the collective though the investment and function of the memory must be similar. A social memory indicates a memory that has been constructed and is widely accepted though the functions of the memory can be very different. A pivotal element of the social memory is that there are many readings, many individual functions but that that it primarily functions to serve as a discursive social unification tactic though it may, and most likely, will not be seen as a discursive tool by the mass population of people that ascribe to the memory construction.

In example a collective memory is that of an event within a community, it serves to build identity and membership but the way the memory can be *read* by each participant can be different. A social memory is that of the construction of crazy or of “the poor” or what poverty means, that many people do not identify the discursive functions of the memory to oppress and dominate though they actively perpetuate this memory by performing supportive arguments within their individual actions, speech acts or linguistic landscapes.

Caruth (1996) suggests a “historical memory” (p.15), what I refer to as a social memory, “ always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic

repression, which make the event available at best indirectly”. The social or historical memory is not accessible by the masses through a direct connection, however individuals are adopting the memory secondary or indirectly. I have also termed this as discursive memory/ discursive narrative, dominant narratives that influence the construction or experience of everyday reality by influencing the bodies of the present with bodies of the past, how they are seen by the dominant groups.

We must ask ourselves, how can we be cognizant of influences of memory construction? How do we reckon with various influences on perception and memory construction? I assert that moving away from the dominant linear encoded texts of narratives of madness is imperative to honoring and valuing the ways of knowing from the community of the crazed. We need to value multi-modal, or transliteracy expressions of narratives that incorporate the various ways we construct memory or embodied experiences. We need to honor external influences such as sound, sight, smell, touch, language construction and use, community investment and community cultural wealth, as well as the simultaneous, multiple layered occupation of space and time. In addition we need to be cognizant of the internal influences: discourse investment, motivation, lived experiences, embodied experiences, lenses and histories.

“The coming together of two absolute claims...is not simply the problem of an outsider’s knowing the inside of another’s experience; more profoundly...something that happens when two different experiences, absolutely alien to one another, are brought together”(Caruth, 1996,p.34). Caruth explores the dominant need to ‘understand’ and organize another’s experience, she asserts that we need to resist this dominant desire to organize the histories of others and to honor and accept the histories of others. The reckoning of multiple histories is done not only by the individual but also within the various communities. Narratives are not meant to

function as a tool to organize and classify another's history but to honor and value other ways of knowing.

Lorde states, "we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. We all shared a war against the tyrannies of silence"(p.41). We "have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism... we have had to fight, and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable... and that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength"(Lorde, 1984, p.42).

Lorde furthers the conversation from Caruth, Hesford and Kozol by stating that we are all fighting against oppression, dominance and erasure though in very different ways in very different status positions. We must resist performing dominance within our own spaces, we must actively work to honor others. Multimodal transliteracy forms of expressions of histories is where this paper has primarily focused on as an act of resistance of dominant forms of knowing and oppression. "For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us"(Lorde, 1984, p.44).

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