



## Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy

**Founding Editor: David Epston**

ISSN 2767-3766

**September 2023**

**Editors:** Tom Stone Carlson, Sanni Pajlakka, marcela polanco, and David Epston

[www.JournalCNT.com](http://www.JournalCNT.com)

Sponsored in part by



---

### Content

- P. 1 [Editors' Note](#)
- P. 2 [The Ring in the Well: Psychosis as a crisis of identity by Christoffer Haugaard, Ava & David Epston](#)
- P. 23 [Breaking The Frame: Aesthetic Encounters with Narrative Practices – Part One by Lucy Merrill Cotter](#)



## Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy

Editors: Tom Stone Carlson, Sanni Paljakka, marcela polanco, and David Epston

---

### Editors' Note

We are excited to announce another release of the Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy. The current release has two papers that really expand the limits of narrative practice.

The first paper, "The Ring in the Well: Psychosis as a crisis of identity" highlights the innovative work of Christopher Haugaard, in collaboration with David Epston, in working with people in relationship with voices.

The second paper, "Breaking The Frame: Aesthetic Encounters with Narrative Practices – Part One" highlights the work of Lucy Merrill Cotter and her efforts to expand the current boundaries and metaphor of narrative practice. We are confident that you will enjoy both papers.





## The Ring in the Well: Psychosis as a crisis of identity

Christoffer Haugaard<sup>1</sup>, Ava & David Epston.

---

In late August 2020, Ava, a young woman in her late twenties, visited the psychiatric emergency room at Aalborg Psychiatric Hospital in Denmark. The emergency room psychiatric files state that she experienced hearing voices and had begun speaking to objects in her apartment. Voices seem to have directed her to go into the laundry room in the basement of the building and remove a grate to climb into the well beneath it. The purpose of doing so was that the voices required Ava to retrieve a ring. Ava also decided to get rid of some of her clothes and cut her long hair short. She did this to rid herself of something from the past and in accordance with an agreement with her own body. Ava was described as seeming to be paranoid, fearing she was being watched or stalked, afraid of going crazy and losing track of the conversation with the professionals. She was considered to be in a psychotic state and according to professional evaluation, the likely cause was stress in relation to the demands of her university studies. Her mental state was described as shifting between seeming to be normal and being in a state of confusion and showing strange behavior, especially in the evening and during the night. The files described some uncertainty as to whether this was a psychiatric problem or a neurological problem, but neurological examinations ruled out the latter. She received an ICD-10 diagnosis of acute polymorphic psychotic disorder without symptoms of schizophrenia.

Ava was discharged from hospital in early October 2020 and referred to outpatient treatment at the facility where I (CH) am employed. I first met Ava in early November as she participated in a group therapy format that I ran that ended in early February 2021. In early March 2021, Ava returned to the psychiatric emergency room and was hospitalized for a second time. The reason was a sudden resurgence of voice-hearing, after their silence since she was last hospitalized. The voices were now behaving differently, commenting on her actions and appearance. Such comments came from a number of voices, the contents of which were both positive and negative. However, no other symptoms were described. According to the psychiatric files, she presented no delusions and

---

<sup>1</sup> Christoffer Haugaard is a psychologist at Aalborg Psychiatric Hospital, Aalborg University Hospital, Denmark. Correspondence: [christoffer.haugaard@rn.dk](mailto:christoffer.haugaard@rn.dk) or [haugaardch@aol.com](mailto:haugaardch@aol.com)





did not suffer the dizziness and confusion of the first hospitalization. She was discharged after one month in hospital, and as she had expressed an interest in conversations with a psychologist, we met and began our collaboration. We met biweekly at first, and later with several weeks between meetings until early February 2022, having had 13 meetings in all. By then Ava had not heard from the voices for a long time, felt that matters from her past had been sufficiently addressed and was in the process of reducing her antipsychotic medication in collaboration with her psychiatrist and psychiatric nurse. During her contact with the hospital, Ava has been treated only with relatively low doses of antipsychotic medication, specifically Quetiapine 50 mg and more recently Aripiprazole 15 mg. Apart from our collaboration, Ava also worked with a psychiatric nurse and a peer-worker.<sup>2</sup>

### **Ava's account of her experiences between August and October 2020**

The following is based on Ava's recollection of events in May 2022:

Ava was required to climb into a well several times under strict instruction from voices she could hear in her head. The well in question was situated in the college dorm laundry room in the cellar and had a removable grate and was just barely wide enough to fit a person of Ava's size and deep enough to reach up to just below her armpits when standing in it. It was for draining water away, and next to it was a tap with a hose. On the last of these descents, Ava had undressed. She really needed to urinate, but the voices strictly forbade that, leading to Ava wetting her clothes. The voices then instructed her to remove the wet clothes and proceed into the well. It was on this occasion that Ava was discovered. A young man from the dorm came into the laundry room to find Ava without clothes on, stating that "I have to get into this well and find a ring. I am married." The young man perceived that something needed to be done, and assisted Ava to return to her apartment. Shortly after, Ava realized that these events were unusual, and she quickly went to his apartment and apologized that he had seen her in that situation. He was very kind, however, and encouraged her to think nothing of it. After this, Ava sought out a female friend also living in the college dorm. Ava excitedly told her that she had just been in a well, saying, "Isn't that cool? How amazing is it that I just did that?!" The friend did not quite see the coolness of it, however, thinking that this is not something you would do in a normal state of

---

<sup>2</sup> A peer-worker is a hospital employee who is or was formerly a psychiatric patient. They represent an insider perspective and work from a Recovery-oriented model.





mind.

Christoffer: Would you say that you were in an altered state of mind during these events?

Ava: I would definitely say that I was, yes.

Christoffer: What you said about recovering a ring sounds as if your actions were purposeful. Were you aware of some meaning of what you were doing? Were voices telling you what to do? Did you perhaps just comply with what they wanted of you?

Ava: Yes. I believed I would be punished if I did not do these things. It was a kind of survival, I think. I recall they said, "You must go down there again. You must do it!" I was also required to do something I really did not like, which was that I had to pour water from the tap into my mouth so that I could hardly breathe, and then spit out the water. Then I climbed into the well. The first time I did it, I was fully clothed. It was on the third occasion that I was undressed and discovered.

These voices demanding that Ava rinse her mouth and get into the well to find a ring only arrived at what proved to be the completion of Ava's unusual experiences. She had not heard them before they turned up to tell her to get into the well. This culmination was preceded by other experiences.

Ava: The first unusual thing that I recall happening was when my heart suddenly started beating very hard and it woke me up from sleep. It was like "bam" and now something psychotic was going on.

Various objects in Ava's apartment started making noises that Ava perceived to be communications directed at her. This included the kettle, the stove and other material objects. She perceived these objects to somehow be communications from friends and acquaintances. They did not speak with human voices, but rather made sounds that Ava decoded for meaning.

Ava: For example, if I wasn't feeling very well, they would make sounds and I would reply to them that I wasn't feeling well, and further sounds implied that I had to explain to them why I wasn't feeling too well. Or if the toilet made a particular sound, it meant that I should use the bathroom. I would also communicate with them while I was cooking. A particular friend was



communicating through the toilet, and another specific friend through the sink. These connections had to do with some specific associations based on colors or word associations.

Christoffer: Were your social relations quite simply present for you in your apartment in this way?

Ava: Definitely. They definitely were.

Christoffer: Was it like having conversations with these objects or was it more a matter of getting instructions?

Ava: It was very much about getting instructions. They were trying to assist me in writing my thesis for university. To motivate me, make sure I ate and got sleep, use the bathroom and shower. A door was a particular person who sort of encouraged me to work on my thesis.

Christoffer: When objects began to communicate and your friends were present in this way, did that strike you as strange or did it not seem unusual to you? Like when you are dreaming, you might experience some very strange or surreal things, but while dreaming, you just accept it? What was this like? Was it frightening or did it seem mundane and quite acceptable to you?

Ava: What I especially recall is that it was confusing. I think I was so committed to it that I just went along with it. It was real to me. I recall working on my thesis and then there would be a sound and I would hurry to get to that person. I had a plastic holster on a shelf, and for some reason, this shelf sometimes vibrated, and the holster would vibrate with it. I took that to be a friend of mine laughing at me, and I'd respond with, "Are you making fun of me?" It would vibrate again, and that meant, "Yes." It was quite real.

Around the same time, Ava experienced a very intense bout of cleaning out her apartment of old things connected to an ex-boyfriend, as well as getting rid of everything in a red color. This was because the color red seemed connected to her ex-boyfriend's mother.

Ava: You can say I was trying to get my ex-boyfriend out of my life. Something new had to happen. Something new was on the way. While I was throwing all these things out, his voice was there, and he was saying "I can see you. I can see what you are doing." I struggled to let go of my formerly potential



mother-in-law, throwing things out that were connected to her through the color red. With every step I took towards the garbage bin with an object, the harder it got. A neighbor helped me to throw things out. While I could hear all these noises in the apartment, I believed that they were communicating with each other, and were getting acquainted. I also perceived them all to have love relations with me. Then at one point, I said to them, "Oh you are really getting cozy, aren't you?" Around this time, I had some considerations about my former boyfriend and his mother being psychopaths. I was also just about to reach the conclusion that maybe he had never really loved me, but just before I quite reached it, there was something from outside that shouted, "STOOOOOP!" I interpreted that to mean that now I just had to get out of this. I was crawling around on the floor and I had to turn off all the lights because I was afraid of electricity and afraid that my former boyfriend's mother would come and kill me. I removed all electrical appliances, so it was quite dark in my apartment.

During this time, Ava also decided to cut off all her long hair, as close to bald as a pair of scissors would allow:

Ava: While reading through my thesis, I heard someone from outside the window shouting, "You are beautiful! I am sorry! You are beautiful!" I picked up a pair of scissors and cut off all my hair saying, "Looks aren't everything. Why must men be so condescending! Violence doesn't solve anything."

Christoffer: What were you feeling while you were cutting off your hair? Was it liberating?

Ava: I was angry. But it was also nice to get rid of the hair. After breaking up with my boyfriend, I wanted something new to happen, so I bleached it to get blond hair and got a perm. By cutting it off I also got back to my own roots in a way.

Christoffer: Yes. Literally!

Ava: Yes! It was also meant to show that I can do things. "Leave me alone. I want to do things for myself. It is my hair and my life, and I don't have to be beautiful all the time."

Christoffer: People around you must have noticed!



Ava: I recall going for a walk with my friend after I cut the hair but before we went to the hospital, and she touched it and said, "Ava, you are so beautiful. Just look at you" because you could see my face more. At one point I also believed that I was pregnant. This was before the well and during the time with hearing voices. I looked at my reflection in a window and noticed my belly and thought, "Hasn't my belly gotten a bit bigger? What is happening?" One of the things I was throwing out at the time was a pair of shoes. I perceived those shoes to be connected to a girl I had seen in dance class. Somehow, I got the feeling that it was her that I was to give birth to. I had to get her out of me. I also sensed that a certain male person with a relationship to my family was also to be borne by me. I would spit a lot during that time. This was to get something out. My feet and ankles were swollen at the time, and I also saw that as an indication of pregnancy.

Christoffer: Was this giving birth a matter of getting something out, like the spitting?

Ava: Yes. There was just something that had to get out.

At a certain point, voices speaking human language appeared and in a very demanding and direct way instructed her to go into the well in the laundry room in the cellar.

Ava: It was a robotic or machine-sounding voice that instructed me, "Now you must do this. Now you must go down there." While pouring water into my mouth just prior to getting into the well, the voices directed me to say that my mother was a prostitute. I did believe she actually was. I also had to say that my mother and my father didn't love me. I had to pour water into my mouth and throat and spit it out and then say these things out loud.

The third time she did so, she was discovered and then visited her friend. Despite Ava's excitement about having been in the well and the unusualness of stating something like that, Ava's friend was remarkably calm. She invited her in, and they cooked a meal and ate together and then spent some time playing a game. She then suggested that they cycle to the psychiatric hospital. It all went very calmly, certainly a credit to Ava's friend.

Ava: She was amazingly cool about it. She was quite fast on the bike, though. I remember this ride to the hospital being quite significant to me. All these





memories came up for me about things from earlier in my life. About what a specific person had said to me and done to me. I kept spitting. I don't know why. Like I had to get clean or having to get rid of something. Every time I had said something, I had to spit it out as well and I was really joyful that I was relieved of that. I could move in a different way, like I felt lighter. It was very liberating. When we had arrived at the hospital, I had these shifts between moments of being exhausted and feeling liberated and a lightness in the body.

Christoffer: She sounds like a good friend. One who isn't easily shaken.

Ava: Both she and the guy who discovered me in the laundry room were just the sweetest people.

Christoffer: Was it significant to you that these people who were involved when you were going through this were so calm?

Ava: I believe so. If they had been all, "Wow what is this, we have to get you to hospital" then it would have been a different reaction, but she was just so calm and calmed me down by just having something to eat together, playing that game and talking about the future. That guy who got me out the well said, "It can happen to anyone," even though that really isn't something you normally hear about. It's not like a broken toe or something. I really went through a lot over a rather short time. I believe it all happened during the course of about two weeks.

During the time that Ava was consequently in hospital, most of these experiences ceased. She does recall many memories of past events showing up for her to deal with, and she had conversations about these memories with a clothes hanger in much the same way as she had communicated with various material objects in her apartment. She also recalls a sense of communication with a close friend, but this did not have the intensity of the time at home. She completed a jigsaw puzzle while in hospital, and this somehow acquired a strong significance for her.

Ava only recalls one other unusual experience while in hospital. She visited the nearby zoo and saw a woman calling out a man's name loudly while standing in front of an elephant. This name was significant to Ava because it was the name of the person she had sensed that she was supposed to marry during the intense events prior to hospitalization. It also evoked an association with an elephant



tapestry that she had at home. At seeing this scene, Ava turned and ran away to prevent being pulled into any further experiences. The person she had sensed that she had to marry was a brief acquaintance that she had become very close to very quickly. This acquaintance was significant for her in a mixed way, involving both the experience of how intimate you can become with another person, but also how people may let you down and hurt you.

### **Christoffer's responses to Ava's account**

Initially, Ava did not give me a complete account of all her experiences during this time of crisis. She told me about it a bit at a time. This meant that I responded to elements of her experiences along the way. Ava told me that a change in her perception of reality happened suddenly and initially told me about the cutting of the hair and about climbing into a well. After a while, she also told me that she had to find a ring in the well and that she also had a sense of this ring being related to being supposed to marry her ex-boyfriend (which she had no actual interest in doing). Upon hearing about these two events, I was seized by some particular associations:

#### **Cutting the Hair**

This cutting off the hair – what could this mean? It seemed symbolically charged to me, especially in light of Ava's gender and the cultural connection between femininity and long hair. Was Ava rejecting something about the femininity of her appearance? Was she repudiating something about the fact that she is a woman? As I was wondering these questions aloud, Ava added that she was actually saying certain things as she was cutting her hair such as, "Looks aren't everything. Why must men be so condescending! Violence doesn't solve anything." This prompted me to ask her if she thought this might be connected to the male gaze. Was Ava rejecting a male perception of her femininity as expressed in her hair? Ava then added that as she was cutting off her long hair, she heard a male voice that sounded concerned and apologetic, saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, please don't cut off your hair. You are beautiful." But this comment about her seeming beautiful to a male voice and the desire of the voice for her to preserve the beauty of her long hair just strengthened her resolve and her desire to reject being beautiful in the eyes of a man. Indeed, these details seemed to me a strong confirmation of a connection between long hair and feminine beauty in the eyes of men, and that this was exactly what Ava was targeting by cutting it, thus making herself "ugly"





according to such a gaze.

Another association I had was concerning initiation. Was Ava going through some kind of initiatory experience? From ethnographic literature as well as my interest in the history of religion, I was aware of the significance in many cultures of initiation processes and that these processes tend to follow a certain pattern (Bramley, 1994; Eliade, 1989; Hartley, 2010; Kvilhaug, 2018; Lukoff & Everest, 1985; Turner, 1979; Wedel, 2009; White & Epston, 1990). According to van Gennep, this pattern or rite of passage has three phases: 1) Separation – the initiate is separated from his or her prior social role or identity. Being a child, for example. This is often understood and performed as a symbolic death. The old identity is ‘killed’ in some way. 2) The liminal phase – a state of being outside the normal social world in which normal relationships are dissolved. At the same time, a new status or identity has not been achieved. One is betwixt and between. Mythically, this is often understood as being in the underworld. New knowledge and powers are often obtained from teachers or supernatural beings in this realm. A search for and the receipt of visions is common. 3) Integration – a return to the social world and stepping into a new social role and identity. Adulthood, for example. It is not unusual for such processes to involve some physical changes to the body, such as tattoos or scarification. I wondered if this cutting of the hair might be seen as a symbolic death and thus a kind of separation from a certain status or identity. Was Ava ‘killing’ an old self, or maybe ‘killing’ a certain perceived identity upheld by people around her? Could this state that Ava was in be a liminal state and part of a separation from a particular identity that had to be ‘killed,’ perhaps an identity specifically connected to gender, femininity, beauty standards, and especially as these are related to a particular male gaze? In such a light, the cutting of the hair appeared to me as almost a spontaneous ritual expression of an initiatory process involving the symbolic death of the feminine self as desirable for men, perhaps even an act of liberation from male dominance. This did not seem irrational or bizarre to me at all. Perhaps the meaning is not obvious in a modern Western context but viewed in the light of initiation rituals and the symbolisms of death and rebirth, it made perfect sense to me. The cutting of hair is not an uncommon signifier of a person’s changed status, particularly a change into a more spiritual way of being, such as is the case with monks in both Christian and Buddhist contexts, as well as in Afro-Atlantic religions (Walker, 1990).

The desire and actions to get something out struck me as some kind of cleansing



action or purification. Ava washed her mouth with water and spoke what seems emotionally difficult material. She felt she had to give birth to someone in order to get them out of her and during this time, she would expectorate a lot. She also recounted negative life experiences to herself while cycling to the hospital and would spit after each utterance in order to get it out. Such acts of self-purification also seemed to me to be quite in line with a process of the death of a former self or an undesirable relation with the past, which seemed to be almost literally expectorated by Ava.

### **Climbing into a Well**

Similarly, Ava's description of being told to climb into a well and indeed doing so seemed pregnant with meaning to my mind. Could there be a more literal way of performing a descent into the underworldly realm of death than by actually climbing into a well – a shaft going down into the bowels of the earth? The darkness of the deep that is symbolically both the tomb and the womb. When voices were telling her to do this several times, might we see the voices as taking the role of virtual leaders of a ritual of descent and ascent, a series of journeys into the dark below? I also took note of the connection to water. The literal tunnel of descent that Ava used was a kind of well for water and it had a tap above it. Indeed, Ava even poured water into her mouth from the tap. In myth and ritual all over the world, water is heavily symbolically charged. So much can be said about water. Perhaps the nearest example in a Western context is baptism – the initiation ritual of Christianity. The initiate is submerged in water, by which the old, profane self dies and the person rises up, like a birth from the amniotic ocean of a mother's womb, born again as a Christian. A descent into and rising up from a watery underworld. The water is the agent of the death of the old self, a cleansing of sin, and a birth into a new relationship with the divine. In the Brothers Grimm story about Mother Holle, an otherworldly realm is reached by climbing into a well; another such fairytale, *The White Snake*, requires the protagonist to retrieve a princess's ring from the bottom of the ocean in order to marry her and to avoid his own death; countless Celtic goddesses of healing and wisdom are personified rivers and springs; the goddesses of Fate in Nordic myth come from and reside by the well of Fate; to become wise, the god Odin must drink from the well of the mind and give an eye as sacrifice; in Central-West Africa as well as in Afro-diasporic Cuba, the dead, the otherworld and a central divinity is identified with the sea, both literally and symbolically, called Kalunga. (Beck, 2009; Cerqueira do Rosario, 2006; Grimm & Grimm, 1884a; Grimm & Grimm,



1884b; Kuusela, 2022; Kvilhaug, 2018; Ochoa, 2008)

The requirement for Ava to take off her clothes and thus be naked also seems symbolically salient. Like cutting off hair, taking off clothes may be a symbolic 'killing' of the self and a purification of something that has been imposed on her. Nakedness may also be seen as a reduction to one's most basic being, unadorned and exposed as what one is beneath everything. A death of imposition and pretenses, perhaps like the goddess Inanna-Ishtar being directed to take off all her adornments and be naked in order to enter the underworld and bring back her lost lover. As well as the symbolism of death, nudity can also be connected to birth, as we all come into the world naked, emerging from a watery tunnel.

But if these descents into a well, pouring water over herself and being naked by the direction of voices is viewed as a kind of death/rebirth process and cleansing ritual, why do the voices direct her to state her parents' unlove for her? My suggestion is that this might be the identity that has been imposed on Ava and from which she is to be purified. Is it a case of Ava being required to name squarely that identity that must die and that she must rid herself of? The false self that this process is intended to destroy.

Ava also added another detail: she had the sense that she needed to retrieve a ring from the well. My immediate association was 'treasure'. Having to go into the darkness of the underworld in order to find a treasure and bring it back up. But what could this treasure be? A ring seemed interesting to me for two reasons: 1) It is circular. Might the circularity of it be significant? The circle as a symbol of wholeness and completeness? 2) The most common ritual use of rings in our society is the engagement ring and the wedding ring. Could this signify that the process that Ava is going through is supposed to lead to wholeness? And in light of the matrimonial associations with a ring, might this wholeness be related to intimacy, connectedness – love even? An engagement or a wedding is also a pact of sorts. It is an obligation and a promise of loyalty. If Ava is symbolically to be married, to whom? Perhaps to her own true self? To her true purpose in life – a purpose beyond being a pretty object for a man to enjoy? I wondered: could the treasure that Ava tries to recover from the darkness in the deep be her true self? Is she the jewel, hidden in darkness, waiting for her to recover it and unite with it?



## Personal history

The situation that Ava describes concerning certain relations being present in objects and being very directive towards Ava, as well as her sense that her former boyfriend did not love her and was a psychopath, and her desire to remove all objects pertaining to him and his mother, gave us cause to consider Ava's history of relations. The hair cutting seemed explicitly connected to the rejection of particular male relations. We did go on to explore this topic, and indeed there were examples of significant and problematic relations to certain men in Ava's history. Her words while cutting off her hair proved to make a lot of sense in light of this history. We focused on these matters and Ava's family relations during a period of our collaboration.

### Ava's evaluation of our collaboration

The following conversations between Ava, Christoffer and David took place in June 2022.

### Ava's evaluation of Christoffer's interpretations and the significance of meaning

Christoffer: When I had the idea that these actions might be meaningful, how was that for you to hear? Did it seem alien or did it make sense?

Ava: It made sense. I haven't read about mythology or rituals or cleansings and things like that, but I was very open to it because I needed a more rational explanation, or an explanation for how it could be so. I didn't think it was crazy.

Christoffer: I recall worrying whether you would think so, but I didn't think it was crazy myself. You say you needed an explanation. Was that missing at that time?

Ava: Yes. Why was I supposed to find this ring and get married to someone I barely knew? Why did I have to cut my hair? I haven't read about what happens in the brain during psychosis, if that is something you can learn from books. Just having had a psychotic episode and that is why I did those things, that was not enough somehow. The things I had to do were so specific and after that I had to enter into a new life. Something like being resurrected and a new life.



Christoffer: Were you aware even before we started talking about it that something was missing in terms of explanation? Were you on the lookout for an explanation?

Ava: No, I don't think that I specifically was. I think some time passed before all the pieces of the psychosis joined together so that I could understand it as a whole. But I think I had the need to understand it. There are still things I don't understand, though. Like why my mother had to be a prostitute and that my parents didn't love me. Well, I can imagine some of it. My sister's dad once told me a story about how his mother was a prostitute. Maybe I pulled something into my psychosis from there.

Christoffer: You may not have consciously sought an explanation when we had our conversations, but I did provide one such after a while. You said it was different from what you had otherwise concerned yourself with. Mythology and such. Did you become aware that you needed an explanation at that time?

Ava: I think I became more aware that there was an explanation. I became more aware that it had a meaning. That I did have to go through a kind of crisis of identity by means of the psychosis.

Christoffer: Is "crisis of identity" a good term for what it was?

Ava: I kind of think that is what it was. Because I had to rid myself of so many old things, and there was so much in the air of my apartment that was just saturated with my past.

Christoffer: You do describe getting rid of a lot of stuff. I have also made a note of how you did a lot of spitting. You poured water in your mouth and spat it out while saying things about not being loved, you spat while feeling pregnant, and cycling to the hospital as thoughts of the past came up and then you would spit and feel better afterwards. To me, it sounds like a cleansing. Like literally spitting something out to get it out of the body.

Ava: It was very much because it was just gross and "eeeew" out with that.

Christoffer: This matter of considering the meaning of your experiences, was that significant for you? The working on how to explain it? Significant to how you looked at it or how you felt?





Ava: That something makes sense – that is a good thing when you are doing something that is so out of the ordinary. It is quite nice to put it into words. Especially with the hair. It was good to have it analyzed.

Christoffer: Did it otherwise seem unintelligible to you?

Ava: A little. I said, “Why do men have to be so condescending” and then cut off some hair. That did not quite make sense to me. But it is something old that is part of me. I know from my mother how important hair is. She has told me that there is much history in the hair. It is not that I am, I don’t know if you would call it superstitious, but it also just felt good to cut the hair. There was a freedom. A new beginning in a way. It has provided me with more meaning to talk about that.

David: Why was it that cutting your hair fitted best with Christoffer’s speculations regarding you “rejecting an imposed identity”?

Ava: I think that cutting of my hair fitted to Christoffer’s speculations regarding me rejecting an imposed identity, because as I cut off my hair I said things such as, “Why must men be so condescending?”, “Beauty is not everything” and “violence does not solve anything.” These things relate to a “former life” that I had, where I was almost living with my sister’s dad. He had a strong influence on me. I had seen him being violent and he has high beauty standards for women. He thinks they must look in a way that matters to him. And I think that I was influenced by his way of viewing things, and I wanted to sort of make statements about this as I cut off my hair and this past life. Also, I had met two guys months before my psychosis, and they saw me as being someone else. Although I might have been wrong, I did feel that they labeled me as only thinking about my looks and being stupid. The explanation as to why I cut off my hair was sufficient to me and resonated in me.

### Evaluation of outcomes

Christoffer: I think it is very interesting that you were doing things that, at least to my eyes, seem very meaningful, as you may read in what I have committed to writing. It seems to follow a mythic-ritualistic pattern. Almost like you are speaking a ritual language, while you at the same time had no prior knowledge of anything like that. And during it, you had no awareness of







anything like that either. Much of it was by instruction from voices that did not provide any explanation, but just said, “Do this and do that.” That really has me speculating about these voices. How on earth do they know these things? It seems mysterious to me that they instruct you to do things that, at least to me, speak an almost ritual-symbolic language. Crawling into a well – of course! This is a journey to the underworld. Cleansing by water. The hair has to go, because the old must die. Clear enough. But you had no awareness of that. How do you look upon this now?

Ava: I do think I went through a crisis of identity. I had to throw all this old stuff out. I suspect that it makes sense in that case. And also, that I had to get married. That also has to do with something new, as I understand it. It makes sense that I had to go through these things, because I was precisely in a state of crisis, and so much was stuck in me. And the past hurt. The past came up and I had not dealt with it sufficiently.

Christoffer: Was this a reckoning with the past?

Ava: It was definitely a reckoning with men who had looked upon me in a certain way. Like I was stupid. I felt like I was put to one side. There were things that had happened within the last month like this that had a great impact on me. I find it strange that just that month could affect me that much during the psychotic episode, as compared to the time from I was a child till I was a teenager or mid-twenties. All that time took up space, but how much space just the past month also took up. I took note of that. That one month can have such a big influence on you when you just meet two people you hardly know.

Christoffer: If this was a reckoning with the past, was it successful? Was it completed? Was it a reckoning that led you to emerge transformed or with a different relationship to your past?

Ava: I think I was a lot less angry at my dad after this than I had been. Less angry at my mom as well. I did find a greater peace after this. I was happier. When I had to leave the hospital and go back to my apartment, it was hard. I cried then. But it was just like I was uplifted. There had been something heavy on my body of emotions that had gotten out. When we were on our way to the hospital it was like I was so light.



Christoffer: What was the role of psychiatry? You said the altered state was wearing off when you arrived in the emergency room.

Ava: That had to do with getting a foothold. To find my own self again. To put it into words. A diagnosis. There were things I hadn't expected at the hospital, like a sense of community and I learned knitting. I could sit down and relax better. Simply eating I don't know how much food. There were so many good things that came out of that too. Trips to the zoo. It was like getting some peace and securing a foothold.

David: Do you think this crisis of identity was something of a close call between say 'losing yourself' and 'finding yourself'?

Ava: You could say that by having a psychosis I lost myself, and by cutting off my hair, throwing out old clothes and other belongings I wanted a new beginning. My hair has grown out now, and I'm starting to feel as myself again. Just more relaxed, at ease – without anxiety and confusion.

David: Do you see "crisis" and "transformation" as synonymous? Or do you see them as somewhat different?

Ava: I think that through a crisis comes a transformation. I don't see them being synonyms, but if you go through a crisis, you can in the end transform yourself. The crisis can in other words lead to a transformation, because I did something emotionally and physically to go through the crisis, which resulted in me cutting my hair and throwing out belongings related to the past.

### Looking back two years later

Christoffer: How do things look in a longer perspective? Two years have passed now. Those two weeks and what you went through – was it a seminal event?

Ava: I think so. Definitely. It helped me put some things in order. And it helped me to let go of things. Much of the past. I had been seeing a therapist before [the psychosis] and we had talked about the relationship I was in and my relationship to my boyfriend's parents. What happened there was a pretty clean cut. Not long after, maybe about half a year, I moved away from that place.

Christoffer: Have there been changes in your life that you connect to this event?



Ava: Definitely. I have gotten a much stronger relationship to both my parents. I talk to my mother every day and my father too. We didn't use to. That relationship has become much stronger. Also to my sister. And to myself, I think. I have found a peace that I have not had before. I was studying back then of course, or maybe I have just gotten older... but so much energy became stored up inside me that just needed to get out, so I jogged a lot, and I don't anymore. I have found a greater calm or peace.

Christoffer: What about men? I got the impression that some of it, especially cutting the hair, was connected to men. Has anything happened with your view of men or gender?

Ava: It's funny, because there was no reckoning with women? It was mainly men that I felt stepped on by. Because I have put away my sister's father, I have found my own father. He is not like that at all, which I have not appreciated before, but do now. He says I am beautiful both inside and outside... I get all emotional. I appreciate my parents a lot more. I have also gotten a boyfriend who is not like that either. I think there are many things that have been healthy for me to go through with this psychosis. I just had to say that not all men are like that and to see that not all men are like that. I did have that, "Why do men have to be like this?" and I generalized a lot.

Christoffer: Did the psychosis put things in a sharp light? Almost like a caricature? One that you had to respond to?

Ava: I think the psychosis gave it just 50% more than what it really was – if not more. There was a lot from reality. I didn't see my dad that often before. Like 3 times a year and talked 3 times a week on Facetime. So, I think there has been a lack of him. When he was in my life, I was stronger.

Christoffer: Do you believe you have become stronger?

Ava: Maybe psychologically. But I haven't had many challenges after this. It was a challenge for me to defend my master thesis, but after I did, I was like, "Was that all? That wasn't so bad." It was basically just a conversation where I had just wound myself up, right. It may also be a challenge to have been looking for work for a year and not having gotten a job. There have been these little things where I might think that the psychosis could have popped up due to some stress, but it hasn't.



Christoffer: Is it like life doesn't throw much at you and what there is, you just don't mind too much?

Ava: Yeah, think so. I think I have actually been quite lucky after all this.

Christoffer: That is remarkable. I wonder if one gets luckier after having been cleansed.

Ava: Yeah. I just think I have become more calm, knock on wood.

Christoffer: Anything else you want to add about it or the meaning of it all?

Ava: It is certainly as if a lot of restlessness has been put on the shelf. Sure, I can get a little restless because I don't have much to do because I don't have a job except some training and practical stuff. All in all, I think I am just more at peace.

Christoffer: I think something in your story challenges the common psychiatric perception of things. In a common psychiatric view – it is less commonly psychiatric to compare your experiences to various myths – but in a conventional view you'd say that during those two weeks that is when you were ill, and then in psychiatric treatment afterwards, you will hopefully get well. But that is not what it looks like to me. I almost feel like saying that during those two weeks is when you got well. Is that taking it too far?

Ava: No. It is not that I wasn't well before that, but I just felt so much lighter after this crisis. It may not be entirely wrong to say what you said. I think it happened for a reason, and I don't think it was just because of stress or anxiety or something like that. I think it was also earlier stuff that came up with this stress and anxiety and pushed it. During the psychosis when I was pretending to have these conversations with these objects there was very much a confession or testimony of sorts.

### Further reflections

I (Christoffer) remain fascinated with how Ava's experiences seemed to be in accordance with mythical or ritual patterns with no conscious awareness of anything of the sort. Likewise, I cannot shake the impression that Ava's psychotic episode appears to have been a healing process. Perhaps Ava's term 'crisis of identity' is a better match than a word that basically means 'mental illness'. It is as





if the 'illness' is a kind of healing in Ava's case. I wonder how far the implications of this may go. Might psychotic states sometimes be intense transformative processes? If some of these states are indeed transformative, or perhaps even mystical in nature, how might clinical psychology and psychiatry best engage with them? Might psychiatry benefit from taking an interest in the possible meanings of such unusual experiences and mental states? Might clinical professionals gain something from engaging with mythology and ritual practices? I do hope that accounts such as Ava's may inspire others to look for meaning in the experiences of people deemed psychotic and consider the possibility of a healing potential in at least some cases of extreme states. (Clarke, 2010; Cooke & Brett, 2020; Dupuis, 2022; Haugaard & Trish, 2021; Lukoff, 1997; Lukoff & Everest, 1985; Phillips, Lukoff & Stone, 2009; Read, 2019)

### Consent

The name 'Ava' is a pseudonym. The person behind the pseudonym has been fully informed about Christoffer's interest in publishing her story and has given her consent for him to write it and expressed her desire for her story to be made available to others to inspire them to find ways to make sense of psychotic states. The paper is based on Christoffer's notes and recollection, psychiatric files as well as two interviews with Ava and written correspondence. Prior to submission and publication, Ava has read this paper and accepted it, and she has given her written consent for it to be submitted to a journal for publication.

### References

- Beck, N. (2015): *The River-Goddess in Celtic Traditions: Mother, Healer and Wisdom Purveyor*. In Guillaume Oudaer, Gaël Hily, Hervé Le Bihan (dir.), *Mélanges en l'honneur de Pierre-Yves Lambert*, Rennes: Tir, 2015, pp. 277-297.
- Bramley, S. (1994): *Macumba – The teachings of Maria-José, Mother of the Gods*. City Lights Books.
- Cerqueira do Rosario, C. (2006): *The Ladies of the Water: Iemanjá, Oxum, Oiá and a living faith*. In *Wagadu* Volume 3: Spring 2006.
- Clarke, I. (ed.) (2010): *Psychosis and Spirituality – Consolidating the new paradigm*. Second Edition. Wiley-Blackwell.





- Cooke, A. & Brett, C. (2020): Clinical psychologists' use of transformative models of psychosis. In *Journal of Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 2020; 27:87-96. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Dupuis, D. (2022): Learning to Navigate Hallucinations – Comparing Voice Control Ability During Psychosis and in Ritual Use of Psychedelics. In Woods, A., Alderson-Day, B. & Fernyhough, C. (eds.): *Voices in Psychosis – Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.
- Eliade, M. (1989): *Shamanism – archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Willard R. Trask (trans.). Arkana. Penguin Books.
- Grimm, J. & Grimm, W. (1884a): The White Snake. Margaret Raine Hunt (trans.) *Grimm's Household Tales*, Volume 1. Retrieved May 2022 at [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Grimm%27s\\_Household\\_Tales,\\_Volume\\_1/The\\_White\\_Snake](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Grimm%27s_Household_Tales,_Volume_1/The_White_Snake)
- Grimm, J. & Grimm, W. (1884b): Mother Holle. Margaret Raine Hunt (trans.) *Grimm's Household Tales*, Volume 1. Retrieved Aug 2022 at [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Grimm%27s\\_Household\\_Tales,\\_Volume\\_1/Mother\\_Holle](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Grimm%27s_Household_Tales,_Volume_1/Mother_Holle)
- Hartley, J. (2010): Mapping our madness: The hero's journey as a therapeutic approach. In Clarke, I. (ed.) *Psychosis and Spirituality – Consolidating the new paradigm*. Second Edition. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Haugaard, C. & Trish (2021): Trish and a Frustrated Voice. In *Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy*, 2021, Release 3, p. 70-86. [www.journalcnt.com](http://www.journalcnt.com)
- Kuusela, T. (2022): Initiation by White Snake and the Acquisition of Supernatural Knowledge. In *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74 (2022) 153-169.
- Kvilhaug, M. (2004): *The Maiden with the Mead – a Goddess of Initiation in Norse Mythology?* Master dissertation in history of religions. Department of Culture, University of Oslo, spring 2004. Retrieved May 2022: <https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/23958/18497.pdf>
- Kvilhaug, M. (2018): *Alle netter ni: Mysterier, innvielsesritualer og den hellige drikken i norrøn mytologi*. Maria Kvilhaug 2018.





- Lukoff, D. (1997): The psychologist as mythologist. In *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 37 No. 3, Summer 1997. Sage Publications.
- Lukoff, D. & Everest, H. C. (1985): The myths in mental illness. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 17 (2). Transpersonal Institute.
- Ochoa, T. R. (2008): Versions of the dead: Kalunga, Cuban-Kongo Materiality, and Ethnography. In *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 22, Issue 4, pp. 473-500. The American Anthropological Society, 2007.
- Phillips III, R. E., Lukoff, D. & Stone, M. K. (2009): Integrating the spirit within psychosis: Alternative conceptualizations of psychotic disorders. In *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2009, Vol. 41, No. 1. Transpersonal Institute.
- Read, J. (2019): Making Sense of, and Responding Sensibly to, Psychosis. In *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 59(5) 672-680. SAGE Publications.
- Turner, V. W. (1979): Betwixt and between: The liminal period in rites de passage. In Lessa, W. A. & Vogt, E. Z. (eds.) *Reader in Comparative Religion – An anthropological Approach*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Harper & Row, 1979.
- Walker, S. W. (1990): Everyday and Esoteric Reality in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé. In *History of Religions*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Nov., 1990), pp. 103-128. The University of Chicago Press.
- Wedel, J. (2009): Healing and Spirit Possession in the Caribbean. *Stockholm Review of Latin American Studies*, Issue No. 4, March 2009.
- White, M. (1997): Challenging the culture of consumption: Rites of passage and communities of acknowledgement. *Dulwich Centre Newsletter*, Nos.2&3.
- White, M. & Epston, D. (1990): *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. Dulwich Centre. W.W. Norton & Company.







## Breaking The Frame: Aesthetic Encounters with Narrative Practices – Part One

Lucy Merrill Cotter, MFT

---

As a painter and collage artist, I have spent years wondering if the word “narrative” limits what narrative therapy can be about. My background in artmaking has opened new perspectives for my narrative practices. In art, a change can be as simple as a crumpled paper, a repositioned image, or a few brushstrokes. I hope to bring that same freedom to the imagined frames of clients’ accounts. Whether through painting, installation, or performance, art offers opportunities to depart from the story metaphor and discursive systems that have felt restrictive and binding. Aesthetics help me reach beyond words in ways that differ from art therapy and somatic healing. Through art, I have learned to unsettle a narrative’s regular usage and to challenge conventional views of space, time, language, and identity. Artmaking has taught me to create openings for unique outcomes.

This article will share some examples and concepts as I continue experimenting with bringing art ideas into my practice in usable, shareable, and helpful ways for my clients. This activity doesn’t detract from my love of stories or my commitment to collaboration with clients in re-authoring their lives. On the contrary, I aim to see if aesthetic retellings can enliven narrative conversations and narratives’ ordering of knowledge.

David Epston recommends that we approach narrative therapy using our “ethnographic imaginations.” His keynote speeches at Therapeutic Conversations (2015) and in San Diego (2018, 2019) appealed to us to be “mavericks in an age of branding.” We are asked to reply to Michael Whites’ question about narrative practitioners, “Why don’t they sound like themselves?” To respond to this question, I felt compelled to untangle the notions of art and narrative in my head. Through art, I learned the ideas of Deleuze, Foucault, Bakhtin, and Derrida. I was introduced to postmodern concepts from this different medium of thought, so the ideas overlapped within narrative therapy in some ways and collided in others. Sometimes, I have felt jarred by narrative teachings and compelled to experiment with an interdisciplinary dialogue between these two worlds.







I was excited by narrative therapy before I knew what it was. There are glimmers of narrative in my thesis from my MFA art show in 1992. Describing my artwork, I wrote, “History, released from being a resolved consensus, becomes a resonant multiplicity of perspectives, plots, and paths. Swarms of fragments and memories can be catalyzed into new fictionalized events ... I attempt to awaken a sense of heterogeneity that breaks our assumptions of order and logic.” Through art, I could visualize the poetics of Christo’s green hills dotted with blue umbrellas or get lost in Twombly’s scribbles and erasures. I learned of shifts in space and time in paintings of the Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime. Artworks like these have expanded my ways of seeing and thinking.

What we look for, we tend to find. At times, I’ve questioned if narrative therapy is at risk of being a canonized system, a naturalistic account of a storied world. I consider the constraints of ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ as our primary metaphors for narrative therapy. I am not alone.

Michael White (2011) wrote:

Although I continue to have a strong appreciation of the narrative metaphor, and expect that this will be an element that continues to shape my explorations of practice, this metaphor can never incorporate all of the considerations that are expressed in these explorations (p. 6).

John Winslade (2016) said:

“And in your comments about social constructionist epistemology I was left wondering about the word narrative. I find it useful sometimes and at other times find it limiting. Narrative practice seems to me to encompass much more than the word narrative suggests. Do others find this?”

(E-mail exchange between John Winslade and Elmo Pienaar on the Narrative Educators Network – June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

Of course, narrative, therapeutic conversations are discursive, rooted in text and plotment. We can never know the whole story, and meaning is socially constructed, mediated by language, and circumscribed by discourses. Narratives are fluid and multistoried, holding new potentials in every retelling. Yet, for decades, my art background had me consider whether plotment defaults to





cohesion and reason at the expense of the contradiction, partiality, and disorder needed for more radical change. I became curious about what art could teach me about using space in clients' stories. Imagery involves us with place, shape, positioning, and media. Each artwork shifts our ways of seeing, interactions, and places to stand. Art can provide options to counter the dualistic division of self and other, internal and external space. I create with the literal and figurative, with concrete form and the ineffable within abstraction. In contrast, the linearity of emplotment may be hazardous as a discourses, dominant social practice for structuring knowledge.

Sometimes, I find myself complying with the spaces and times that stories include as part of narrative logic. I am curious about the effects of sequencing and framing on the meaning potentials of clients' accounts. I am particularly suspicious of space, time, and sense-making that are reduced to what is functional to a story as a system (Morson, 1994). As an artist arriving at narrative practices, emplotment seemed to privilege "narrative necessity" and rationalism over alternative forms of sense-making (Bruner, 1991, p. 4). We defer to the thoughts that "can most easily be grasped" and placed within discourse (De Certeau, 1984, p. 20/ Bolt, 2004, p. 4). My clients benefit from cohesive narratives that plot their values, purposes, and hopes through time, but emplotment can also curtail meaning based on its 'logical,' linear requirements.

These questions made my practice more invitational to a different kind of sense-making and ordering of experience. For me, a narrative's organizational properties naturalize the story frame and prioritize the legible and familiar. I wanted to learn whether customary notions of causality elicited response biases based on emplotment. It seems that my clients and I inadvertently favored what was most readily accommodated by language and plot. In addition, our stories give authority to the omnipotence of text over imagery's ambiguity. I am uncomfortable with therapy's privileging of concrete, quantifiable language over meaning that hovers in the potentials of uncertainty. It has made me wonder what categories and divisions of experience, in the first place, I have succumbed to for work in the field of psychology.

Here is a segment of a conversation with a client. She struggled to get beyond the constraints of discourse to describe experiences that, rather than being rescued



by embodiment or art therapy, require aesthetic, non-discursive modes of expression that defy conventional categories.

Lucy: Is it okay if I ask what you meant earlier about random thoughts? Did you value the randomness of the thoughts?

Ava: When young or now it was kind of like different from where my parent's thoughts were coming from. For me it fit logically, it wasn't random.

Lucy: Was it a different kind of logic?

Ava: Yes.

Lucy: Is that something you still value?

Ava: I do. Working in that kind of thinking is really, really creative. It works in what I do but it doesn't always work in verbal communication. It's in leaps, patterns, deeper meanings. For me, I need to make those leaps.

Lucy: Does language feel restrictive?

Ava: Yeah.

Lucy: That makes you sad, that question.

Ava: Yeah (tears). It's frustrating because, yeah, it's sometimes hard to... Definitely what I'm strongest at. Getting it all into language, it frustrates me.

I know the challenge of translating ideas into words. My language has always been visual, and as an artist, I learned how to create space through imagery for new kinds of representation and perception. At Otis College of Art LA in 1990, my greatest mentor Simeon Wade introduced me to many of Giles Deleuze's concepts as they applied to artmaking. These ideas continue to enrich my narrative practices. Simeon was a brilliant scholar and teacher, best known for his book *Foucault in California* (2019), which documents his infamous 1975 trip with Michel Foucault in Death Valley. His work as a psychiatric nurse with the



schizophrenic population inspired him to embody the ideas he taught. Simeon mentioned Deleuze's celebration of the schizophrenic, not as it is known within the pathologies of modernist psychology but rather as a position of multiplicity. He spoke of alternative orderings of space that confront and undermine our conventional organizational systems. Through art, we learned to question the aesthetic arrangements of individualism, dualism, and linear histories. Using multiple locations and creative imagery, he explained the dire necessity for plurality and difference.

Simeon taught about diversity using images of heirloom beans and seeds. Ever since, I have seen wild colors and speckles in my mind's eye. If we traveled back one hundred years, we would find a world with beans and seeds of every imaginable variety. Simeon shared this as a call to arms. We must see rescuing difference as a philosophical and political imperative. Without heterogeneity and genetic variability, one wrong fly or atrophying disease could destroy the seed and bean populations forever. Like beans and seeds, multiplicity and difference are critical to people's survival. Simeon spoke to the need for variability in our understanding, seeing, and imagining. We are to play with perception, and through it, we are to gain diversity in how we conceive of representation and thought. I have come to understand the power of Deleuze's concept of multiplicity as it applies to reauthoring. There is a need for multiple places to stand in telling our stories. Every spatial arrangement must stay open to the additional potentials of less dominant meanings.

Years ago, I was attracted to ideas in Deleuze's essay, *What is the Creative Act* (1987). Deleuze writes: "Counter- information is only effective when it becomes an act of resistance," and "... there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance" (pp. 312-324). Yet, as my art and narrative practices grew, I began to question the term "resistance." I thought about how resistance always assumes opposition to another implicit conceptual starting point, rather than the multiplicity of perceptual experiences. What if these repetitive origins keep us constrained in predetermined systems? Art has inspired me to look beyond the individual subject's actualized story elements. I consider whether stories and histories are based on worn, hand-me-down, frequently discursive concepts. Are the origins of our conversations tied to insidious assumptions of culture, power, and sense-making? How are we recruited into spaces that are already familiar, blinding us to the potentials of the unactualized and virtual? The





cultural studies author, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth (2011), was one of the strongest influences on my artmaking. She contributed that Slavoj Žižek (2002, 2006) “ ... argues that true politics involves not resistance but instead an un-precedented, even un-premeditated, Act” (p. 121). She goes on, “It is an action that disrupts habitual usage or enunciation so as to unlock new potentials of a discursive system...” (p. 121). As an artist, I have the freedom to start from nothing and to imagine anything at all. I can move an image or my body from one place to another, erase, destroy, and perform anew. Art has multiple strategies to break free from the restrictions of a space’s encoded parameters. Deleuze’s (1994a, 1994b) concept of an ‘image of thought’ helped me to imagine some of these tactics.

### Storied Images of Thought

Deleuze describes an ‘image of thought’ as a space of presupposition that dictates how we form concepts (1994a, 1994b). These images determine where we are starting from and what we are allowed to think. An image of thought can use an objective or subjective frame. In either case, it imposes a differentiated, conceptual location that anchors what is to follow. Our images of thought rob us of the options of a virtual world free from the actualizations of systems and assumptions. This concept helps me look more closely at my clients’ and my shared expectations and how they might usurp the arrival of atypical notions. Deleuze includes eight postulates that interfere with creating novel encounters (1994a, p. 167). Three of these postulates, common sense, recognition, and representation, became integral to my artwork and narrative sessions.

Over years of narrative practice, I have become increasingly curious about what we include or disqualify in our inquiries. I wonder if we must always begin with a life story that maintains a logic grounded in earlier subjective experiences. If our goal is to generate new storylines, then every memory or thought may diminish what we see as possible. Our storied experiences teach us wisdom. They also create presuppositions that are hard to overcome. The narrative therapist’s ability to maintain a not-knowing philosophy (Anderson) allows us to be “learners” freed from the images of thought that block access to new visions. Jerome Bruner (2002) writes, “Why this seemingly innate addiction to story? Beware an easy answer! Even etymology warns that “to narrate” derives from both “telling” (narrare) and “knowing in some particular way” (gnarus) – the two tangled



beyond sorting” (p. 27). For me, therein lies the dilemma. How do we move between ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’? How do we challenge the “particular ways” that determine what we call ‘knowledge’ in the first place? The narrative therapist’s ability to stay tentative and in motion between multiple conceptual locations gives access to multidimensional meanings.

Art and narrative share in the allure and mystery of not-knowing. We can celebrate the suspense of life’s unexpected outcomes. In art, we refer to unplanned occurrences as “happy accidents.” We must take unknown leaps into the renegade to invent ‘form’ that evades prior history or function. I am intrigued by Deleuze’s concept of a “body without organs,” where one can inhabit a space of openness without committing to that space’s organizational system. To me, there are times when the system is the story itself. I ask myself if a coherence of genre, characters, and plot creates meaning at the sacrifice of some of the stories’ unactualized potentials. The musician Scott Wollschleger (2015) writes of Deleuze’s influence on his composition for soprano and trumpet in C, “... I personally think the goal of art should be: rendering something into existence that is inconceivable before it happens.” As a narrative therapist, I want to honor the continuity of my clients’ histories and cultures while co-creating novel events that escape predetermining assumptions and images. These surprises take us beyond representation, beyond the known.

Narrative therapists view meaning as socially constructed through language and relationships. We see “knowledge” as linked with history, culture, discourses, and power and co-create empowering descriptions that challenge the “truth claims” in clients’ stories. Yet, I have wondered if there are times we are shuffling story elements that originate from the same image of thought. Is everything new referenced back to the limits of our earlier understandings (Bruner, 1986,1991)? For me, this is the ultimate “truth claim.” An image of thought appears to be taken-for-granted ‘knowledge,’ but it is a single-storied frame maintained by power operations at the expense of insurgent, systemic change.

To Deleuze, our lines of flight are departures from known territories. Although our imaginations can conjure “Lines of Flight,” our stories create launching pads, the causal sites of expectation. Artists and narrative therapists often value “events” and “lines of flight” as counterplots to images of thought. Art brings us to the precipice of representation, allowing multiple escapes from the boundaries of



discourse. Indeed, art fights the very idea of the inevitable. I'm free to change mediums, contexts, and processes. I can easily pick up my pencil and move to a different territory. A joy of art is the freedom to create anything at all. This liberty is tangible when we stare at a blank canvas, empty field, or ball of clay. In art school, I was struck by Bachelard's (1969) quote, "*When the image is new, the world is new*" (p. 47). I believe an aesthetic awareness of our images of thought gives us access to new worlds. Aesthetics can help to overturn the "dogmatic images" in our narratives and the dictates of actualized story elements. By interrogating the images of thought in clients' stories, we open space for new perceptions.

### The World Picture

When Michael White writes of his enthusiasm for "other worlds," he inspires me to join my clients to explore uncharted territories (2007, p. 3). We often hear of worldbuilding in stories and imagine a sense of place, theme, history, and character development. Narrative therapists share the intention to call out the forces of power, discourses, and systems that permeate our everyday world constructs. Yet, inherited concepts limit our lives, and our fresh visions often are reconstituted within outdated representational frames. Whatever the medium, art has taught me how to create encounters. Art asks us to position ourselves in relation to the environment. We look at where we stand and what captures our attention. Artworks summon us into specific questions about how we are participating and whether these are active or passive engagements. Each work demands our awareness of our centered or decentered positions and forces us to locate ourselves as separate viewers or a part of the work.

We often relate the size of a story to the scale of the human body, and we risk getting trapped in body-sized spaces. Whether giant or small, an artwork's scale can interrupt these conventional expectations. We gaze up at Jeff Koons's giant Balloon Dog sculptures, Claes Oldenburg's enormous hamburgers, or JR's photographic overlays on buildings. Often, we can move in and touch the surface. These artworks conflate and scramble our conceptions of public and private space. If we view the tiny figures in miniature dioramas of Tatsuya Tanaka, we might delight in his whimsical use of everyday objects while being drawn to their details.





These artworks have me consider the scale of my narrative questions. As an artist, I contrast “mouse vision” to “eagle vision.” In narrative, I collaborate towards the personal and local, while considering the systemic and global. Our experience-near questions allow for rich, scaffolded stories. We can also make larger, more radical shifts towards less sanctioned or visible worldviews. On an intimate scale, I might ask, “What does your grandmother know about your love of talking with trees?” The question “Can you still hear the willows” might come even closer. A question such as, “What are you valuing when you wonder if it’s possible for a person’s greatest contribution to be leaving no footprint behind?” has us speculate from a greater distance, often outside of conventional systems.

I’m curious about our habitual grasp of scale for therapy itself. In my practice, I frequently see that the distinctions between self and other are blurred. Although therapy tends to default to the subjective, most of us share a felt sense of being part of an acute time in the world, a palimpsest of shared trauma and longing. At times it becomes hard to parse out our personal and collective experiences and therapy has lost relevance as a solely individualistic venture. I can hear the pain of the world in my clients’ words. One client stated, “I’ve been feeling the weight of the world and the weight of my friends’ worlds this week ... I’ve felt overly attuned to sadness, not necessarily just for me, but for everywhere.” Another client said, through tears, “I’m just sad about humanity. Because of how important it is for people to be kinder to one another... People are speaking from pain and they call that truth and they call that fact.” My clients’ global concerns demand that psychotherapy speaks to these challenges.

Artmaking has taught me about dominant representational assumptions in Western philosophy that divide the mind and body, humankind, and the environment. Descartes (1637) privileges man’s subjective rational experience. The philosopher Heidegger sees the human subject as dominating a world that is reduced to a fixed, framed image (Bolt, p. 17, pg. 55/ Heidegger, p. 134). Although a narrative mode of thought is a pluralistic contrast to these dualistic worldviews (Bruner), I sometimes wonder if narrative therapy still insidiously perpetuates dualism. I appreciate narrative therapy’s distinct contributions to being multi-perspectival, yet we regularly anchor our stories to the viewpoint of a single protagonist. Sometimes this is beneficial, and perhaps other times, it is to my clients’ detriment. The choice to see space as interactive or at a distance affects how we see the world and make meaning together. Art has shown me how to use





space to become a part of the larger world. I hope narrative therapy can learn to challenge conceptual images that keep the individual and the world apart.

### Beyond Representation

As an artist, I think about the human urge to render our lives through imagery. Whether ancient petroglyphs or memes on social media, each representational choice intertwines with its own history, culture, and beliefs. We can see the dualistic division of subject and object in the Western realist art of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The eye level of the viewer determines the disappearing “horizon line,” or train tracks of linear perspective.

Aesthetics helps to transport psychology beyond its traditional focus on the individual subject. In time, Western art sets us free from the illusion of mimesis and art’s goal of imitating the subject’s “reality.” We are released from the seer subject as a location and source of meaning (Hutcheon, 1989). Art can help us visualize how to move through various locations of meaning and explore the multiple positions we can occupy. The Impressionists play with the dissolution of solid objects into texture, color, and light. The Cubists fracture the picture plane and the spectator’s singular perspective (Berger, 1972, p. 18). As a narrative therapist, a favorite quote from Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth has inspired me. She writes that Cubism’s simultaneous, multiple perspectives demand that “any single spectator ... be in several places at once” (1992, p. 108). This is what art has done that I want to invite more of in narrative therapy.

The invention of the camera even more drastically liberates us from the individual’s position as the world’s sovereign. In the classic text, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger (1972) describes how the human spectator is central to drawing and painting, whereas “The camera - and more particularly the movie camera” liberates us from an immobile “position in time and space” that privileges the singular, centralized view of the human subject (p. 17-18). Berger clearly states, “The invention of the camera changed the way men saw” (p. 18). I continue investigating art’s liberations of imitation and positioning within my narrative practices. As art frees us from mimesis and fixed forms, it catalyzes the virtual, less visible, unfinalizable, and migratory. The neutrality of realism and one-point perspective explode into diverse viewpoints, contrasts, and contradictions (Ermarth, 1992). We reject normative categories, and the mirroring of a



transcendent, essentialist realm and the objectified world transforms into multiplicity and dissonance. Through art, we see realism give way to invention. Artmaking assists our grasp of process over product and movement over stable structures. The act of representation becomes blatantly exposed, and the viewer engages as a vital participant (Cotter, 2005). In this way, art moves from representation to performance (Bolt, 2004, p.8), and we become interactive, relational parts of the world. These are speculative fictions of contrasting, aesthetic, and intertextual vantage points.

Postmodern artists and therapists choose to disrupt the totalizing, singular viewpoints that present as factual, coherent, and necessary (Rosenau, 1992). If realist art implies an accurate mirror for the world, postmodern art celebrates ambiguity, contingency, and indeterminacy. In literature, we see a similar movement away from realism towards fluidity, fragmentation, and contradiction. Like art, narrative therapy encourages radical innovations. Michael White writes, “It is through this unpacking of these naturalistic accounts that we come to know the history of alternative knowledges of life and practices of living ... we can engage with the unexpected” (White, 2001, p. 147). Aesthetic approaches help me to see the “unexpected” and imagine new worlds with my clients.

The following are some examples of artworks that have helped me play with concepts for narrative practices. Each artwork grapples with representation and elicits questions about space, time, ordering, abstraction, and language. These are ‘aesthetic means to narrative ends’ based on my own experiences rather than metaphors or illustrations. The palimpsest, the ready-made, collage, abstraction, earthwork, performance, and installation all hold various narrative potentials. I am aware that my selections are mainly from the Western canon. I hope that some of these ideas might invite dialogue with others. In this article, I am sharing the first example, from *La Trahison des Images*, by René Magritte.





### *La Trahison des Images* ~ René Magritte, 1929

René Magritte (1898 -1967) was a Belgian painter who was part of the Surrealist movement in 1920s Paris. His painting, *La Trahison des Images* (*The Treachery of Images*), also known as *This is Not a Pipe*, gave me a particular opportunity to think about Narrative Therapy and representation. *The Treachery of Images* asks viewers to consider the connections between text and imagery, reality and thought. It suggests that we are constantly negotiating language and meaning. As in narrative practices, we question how language determines our perception of reality. As an artist, I was trained to challenge representational certainty. Here, we challenge the trickery of language.

#### Image/Text

Magritte's painting is a precursor to the linguistic turn Wittgenstein wrote about in the 1920s and in full force by the 1970s and 1980s. It is an early example of an artist's look at the intersection of imagery and text. Later, contemporary artists frequently explore how language and imagery collude with the construction of identity, politics, and power. These artworks are more recent warnings to be suspicious of language as a neutral conveyer of meaning. Many artists combine photography and text in ways that increase our awareness of the schisms between representation and lived experience. Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Cindy Sherman, Ed Ruscha, Bruce Nauman, and Baldessari are classic examples of artists whose conceptual work use appropriation, juxtaposition, and slogans to produce social commentary. Like Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*, their artworks warn me of language's hazardous deceptions. For narrative therapists, these works can support curiosity about how text and imagery reinforce clients' naturalized conclusions about identity and the world.





*Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground) 1989/2019*

Single channel video on LED panel

At a lecture I attended in 2007, W. J. T. Mitchell discussed Magritte's desire to "undermine the assumptions of representation" and "question the premises" that we're "operating under." (W. J. T. Mitchell, personal communication, 2-4-2007 On Magritte, LACMA). As is understood by narrative therapists, we challenge the idea of a stable system where speech, text, and images correlate with an external reality (Rosenau, 1992). We look at the ways that language derives meanings within social contexts. Instead of language being a source of empirical solidity, language is complicit with ideology, culture, and power. Magritte's painting speaks to the untethering of language from mimesis. He intimates that neither words nor images can bring us closer to an actual pipe that one can hold in one's hand. Instead, narrative therapists prioritize the socially, historically, and culturally specific, and postmodern images and texts remain delightfully problematic. I bring this inventive spirit to my collaborative work. We can embrace the gift of uncertainty and the freedom to create.

Just as *La Trahison des Images* demonstrates that there is no one-to-one correspondence between an external object and its representation, our narratives are never entirely the things they represent. Similarly, a problem's truth claims will never be equivalent to our clients' multistoried experiences. As White (2000) writes, "... the accounts of life that shape expression do not represent a one-to-one correspondence with the properties that exist in whatever it is that is being described in these accounts" (p. 36). As a narrative therapist, I find it important to interrogate any relational correspondence that totalizes the potentials of meaning and identity. Our words, maps, and stories are mere figments, mere constructs of visual and articulated vocabulary.

Most narrative therapists are aware of Korzybski's (1933) "maxim, 'the map is not the territory'" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 2). Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* speaks to a less well-known part of Korzybski's quote: "... the word is not the thing ..." (1933, pp. 747–761). There is always this gap in representation, whether a map, photograph, painting, or language itself (Bolt, p. 17). Narrative therapy uses these gaps to actively reauthor clients' storylines. When problems disguise themselves as 'truth,' they are perceived as solid and real. The practice of





externalizing creates a gap where “the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem.” Likewise, unique outcomes and exceptions are a gap in clients’ dominant problem stories. These spaces in language allow clients’ experiences to be made into new constellations of meaning.

Epston & White (1990) describe Bateson’s (1972) reference to Korzybski’s maxim in writing “...the understanding we have of, or the meaning we ascribe to, any event is determined and restrained by the receiving context for the event ... the interpretation of any events was determined by how it fit with known patterns of events, and he called this “part for whole coding” (p. 2). I am curious about this and Bruner’s (1991) concept of “Hermeneutic composability” (pp. 7-13). Bruner writes of this feature of narrative that our interpretations make sense as part of a larger story. He describes hermeneutic composability in writing, “The accounts of protagonists and events that constitute a narrative are selected and shaped, in terms of a putative story or plot that then "contains" them” (p. 8). I am suspicious of Bateson and Bruner’s concepts which seem to select what functions best in a story as a system. I want to return to Deleuze’s concept of the image of thought, a conceptual presupposition that determines what is allowed to be recognized and made sense of. These receiving contexts that Bateson and Bruner describe create images of thought, or presuppositions, that constrain my client and my access to concepts outside of the story’s structure.

Both artists and narrative therapists rely on the use of context. By placing things in context, we deconstruct neutrality and see how things are made. But at times, reliance on context may be limiting. We may want to break free from how a context’s particular operating system makes things. A new context expands our meaning-making potentials. The differences in these intentions are exciting to my art and narrative practices. These are opportunities to incorporate multiple strategies. The following sections look more carefully at each approach.

### **Placing things in Contexts – Revealing their Production**

Socially constructed meanings appear to be transcendent, objective, and sourceless and notoriously disguise the mechanisms of their production. We place ideas in context to deconstruct these “truth claims,” revealing the presuppositions, mediums, and processes that make and sustain them. For narrative therapists, looking at the surrounding conditions that play a part in our clients’ accounts is



critical. We regularly question the devices, discourses, and injustices contributing to our clients' descriptions. Michael White (1992) writes of the importance of situating clients' experiences in context. He writes, "... deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; these so-called 'truths' that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production" (p. 121). By situating ideas and events in context, we reveal the societal, familial, and cultural environments that have influenced their construction. This context removes the "disguise" of the truth claim by revealing its "mechanism of production."

In art school, I became interested in Roland Barthes' (1972) book *Mythologies* and its descriptions of how meanings become disguised as natural and necessary. Barthes sees myth as transforming meaning into form. As a narrative therapist, I see how my clients' problems appear factual and essential until we expose the operations that give rise to them. In one example, I have seen a brilliant young woman discard her powerful voice to conform to society's gender expectations. In another, my client is called "co-dependent" for the depth of their relational caring. Another client is labeled as violent for defending an injustice or themselves. Without contexts, stories camouflage the apparatuses that support these misrepresentations. As narrative therapists, we deconstruct how stories are made by interrogating their framework, medium, and agenda.

Artists are aware of their choices of medium from the start. Particular materials will best serve their intentions. Whether video, paint, or clay, to name a few, each has an identity and life of its own. I think about how our choices of mediums are always acts of translation. In each case, something is expressed by means of something else (Bruner, 1986, p. 23). To Deleuze, each medium and genre have the capacity to produce different concepts. If this is the case, I want to consider the mediums of thought I am using as a narrative therapist. I am noticing what my client and I are paying attention to as sources and modes of expression. We might locate mediums of thought in a story, culture, art, the body, metaphysics, or philosophy, to name a few. Our therapeutic conversations are grounded within these assorted genres and means. Each is affecting our concepts and expectations. In the last few years, I have started to consider more seriously when my clients and I might be mistaking our perceptions to be objective and unmediated.







Magritte calls attention to the mediation of language. We are often blind to the signs of things being manufactured. But all representation mediates our experiences, and media is never neutral or without influence. Artists have multiple strategies to expose mediation and contexts. In art, we often “reveal the device.” We deconstruct the making of things that appear to be process free. I found revisiting the Russian Formalists such as Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson helpful. Their structuralist explorations of “defamiliarization” became one of my personal and professional core values. I want to commit to a life where my clients and I can reinvent wonder and see with fresh eyes. I think of a client’s question to me, “Do you ever just feel you have this capacity, an energy that defies logic within you somewhere that’s gotten stuck within boundaries and habits?” Shklovsky’s 1917 essay, “Art as Device” (or Art as technique), has us look at how our perceptions have become “automatic.” Through art, we can disrupt formulaic thinking and our habitual ways of seeing (pp. 79-96).

Bruner (1986) reminds me that Jakobson and the Prague School urge us to stop defaulting to recognition and start to see anew (p. 22). Of course, there are times that narrative therapists may use recognition to add cohesion to clients’ preferred identity descriptions collaboratively. We can help clients reauthor rich storylines and thicken their values, purposes, and commitments. Yet, to make the familiar “strange,” we must fight against the recurrent recognition of the known. Art can problematize and enliven our “taken-for-granted” accounts. It seems integral to narrative therapy to situate clients’ experiences in context to reveal the mediums and mechanisms of their production.

### **Breaking from the Familiar- Breaching the known**

David Epston urges us to ask questions that will take us “where the buses don’t run,” reminding us of the importance of the novel. We can depart from ordinary contexts to invent new meanings and unimagined territories. Art supports my desire to break from the familiar and access the unknown. The Dadaists, Surrealists, and Formalists have taught me to welcome and celebrate the anomalous, contradictory, and surprising. I think of David Epston and Michael White’s interest in Bourdieu’s (1984) exoticizing of the familiar or the “domestic.” I recall narrative therapy’s aim to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.





Magritte is asking us to interrogate our representational assumptions and disrupt our habits of meaning-making. In art school, I highlighted the Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth (1992) quote, “Surrealism sought to estrange the human mind from its own conventional systems of grasping and fixing so-called reality into univocal postures and ‘meanings’” (p. 106). Surrealism brings us Dali’s melting clocks, Miro’s biomorphic squiggles, and Man Ray’s disembodied lips in the sky. Each artist overturns our commonplace visions. Art critic Dr. Jeanne S. M. Willette (2014) added to my understanding by writing that Foucault “...was interested in Surrealism and its strategies that attempted to undo narrative connections that made the world make sense.” Our narratives can be seen as arbitrary and fabricated fictions and therefore open to more far-reaching invention (Ermarth, 1992, p. 106). As a narrative therapist, Surrealism inspires me to problematize and disrupt my client and my habits of sense-making.

### **The Dangers of Common Sense**

For years, I’ve taught Critical Psychology and asked my students if they’ve had unusual experiences that they’ve censored from therapeutic conversations, even with a very trusted therapist. They’ve shared many of these examples in our learning community. Talks with the dead, reincarnation, and flashes of unexpected fire. Numerous accounts of telepathy beyond logical explanation. Moments of synchronicity that exceed coincidence. We’ve learned about messages from birds, dogs, butterflies, electric lights, and toasters. If there’s one thing that stands out for me, it is that my students fear being judged as crazy in therapeutic settings. They’ve keenly voiced a profound hesitation to expose these precious moments to the potential risks of a knee-jerk and dominant rationalism. I’m increasingly curious about various cultural outlooks on these less-sanctioned experiences. I’m interested in stories that are harder to validate or articulate, beyond the somatic challenges of identifying feelings in language. I invite my clients to more mysterious and other-worldly accounts and welcome the illogical and metaphysical.

Common sense is determined by dominant frameworks. Foucault helps us grasp that knowledge and power are inextricably intertwined and that control over language and meaning are the resources of those in power (White & Epston, 1990, pp. 21-22). How often are we recruited into these systems by default, and what options become available when art reminds us of the potential of what we







have deemed to be impossible? Deleuze suggests that our images of thought are predetermined by conventions of sense-making. Frequently, we see problems defined as psychological when they are political or social. They are often given truth status in the guise of sensibleness and reason (Hare-Mustin, 1994). Of course, we need common sense when it comes to not running into traffic. There are times to follow the rules and other times to break them. Yet, we don't all agree on which times are which.

It is typical for the artifices of common sense to dictate normative standards. Even as narrative therapists, we may be complicit with mental health traditions. For Bruner (1991), our narratives are versions of reality guided by the requirements of coherence and custom. Traditional psychology can be the death knell of difference, and the categorization of mental health by the DSM is a prime example. Our sense-making relies on recognizability. We see what we think we know, and this "knowledge" is already bound by power, history, and 'logic.' We are blind to our own customs, as well as to cultural variance.

Another danger of common sense can be seen in this brief example from a couple I've worked with.

Grady: "I'm good at arguing like a lawyer. I know it can be difficult for other people."

The three of us discuss that when we use logic it sometimes ignores other meanings.

Lucy: "I think you're saying that something matters, even if it's 'wrong'?"

Jake: "Yes, that really hits home. I may be justified even if Grady doesn't understand it. It's still really important to me."

It is the slippage of meaning between right and wrong that we often need to embrace. The so-called "cognitive distortions" that don't need to be changed but rather honored for the profound meanings they occupy.

Magritte's painting suggests that "common sense" is determined by what is recognizable. When Foucault (1983) discusses Magritte, he compares "resemblance" and "similitude." Whereas resemblance is based on replication and mimesis, similitude has no single item as a prototype for the rest (Foucault/





James Harkness (translator). As a narrative therapist, I want my clients' stories set free from the predeterminations of resemblances. Although resemblances appear to be necessary, generalizations and social practices sustain them. Our common-sense assumptions rely on what we have done before. Instead, Deleuze encourages us to embrace the folly of unrealized experiments. He writes, "... the diversity of nonsenses is enough to give an account of the entire universe, its terrors as well as its glories..." (1997, p. 22). With this spirit, I want my clients and I to explore the aesthetic potentials of the unactualized and virtual. Magritte has reminded me of the wonders that lie beyond conventions of representation. I aspire to capture these distinctions in my collaborative conversations.

### To be continued ...

As I decipher the intersections of art and narrative, aesthetic concepts continue to creep into my narrative practices, sometimes in surprising ways. I am grateful for decades of artmaking that have helped me to see narrative through this different medium of thought. It has challenged me to think more carefully about the story metaphor. I've learned about representation, context, and conventions of sense-making. Through the years, I have looked at many art examples to play with aesthetic ideas for narrative therapy. My main themes have been language and repositioning, space and geography, time and history, movement and performance. Next, I will share how Marcel Duchamp's and Cecil Touchon's artworks taught me additional ways to confront language, order, and the seduction of resemblance.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank David Epston, Charley Lang, and Caley O'Dwyer for their invaluable feedback and encouragement.

### References

- Bachelard, G. (1969). *The poetics of space*. Beacon Press.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1957)
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. University of Chicago Press.





- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. Penguin Books.
- Bolt, B. (2004). *Art beyond representation: The performative power of the image*. I.B. Tauris & Co.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo academicus* (P. Collier, Trans). Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1984)
- Bruner, J. S. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. S. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448619>
- Bruner, J. (2002). *Making stories: Law, literature, life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 71(3), 691-710. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2004.0045>
- Certeau, M. D. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Randall, Trans.). University of California Press.
- Cotter, L. (2005). *Restoring after loss: A postmodern, narrative approach to grief* [Master's thesis, Pacific Oaks College].
- Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and repetition* (P. Patton, Trans.). Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1968)
- Deleuze, G. (2007). What is the creative act? (A. Hodges & M. Taormina, Trans.). In D. Lapoujade (Ed.), *Two regimes of madness: Texts and interviews 1975–1995* (pp. 317–329). Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?* Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze G. (1997). *Essays critical and clinical* (D. W. Smith & M. A. Greco, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Ermarth, E. D. (1992). *Sequel to history: Postmodernism and the crisis of representational time*. Princeton University Press.





- Ermarth, E. D. (1998). *Realism and consensus in the English novel: Time, space and narrative*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Ermarth, E. D. (2011). *History in the discursive condition: Reconsidering the tools of thought*. Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1983). *This is not a pipe* (J. Harkness, Ed. & Trans.). University of California Press.
- Hare-Mustin, R. T. (1994). Discourses in the mirrored room: A postmodern analysis of therapy. *Family Process*, 33(1), 19-35.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.1994.00019.x>
- Heidegger, M. (1977). The age of the world picture. In W. Lovitt (Ed.), *The question concerning technology* (pp. 115-154). Harper and Row.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. Routledge.
- Hutcheon, L. (2002). *The politics of postmodernism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Korzybski, A. (1933). *Science and sanity: An introduction to non-Aristotelian systems and general semantics*. The International Non-Aristotelian Library Pub. Co.
- Leilehua, A. (2015). *Bring something incomprehensible into this world*. Scott Wollchleger. Retrieved from <https://scottwollschleger.com/work/bring-something-incomprehensible-into-this-world/>
- Mitchell, P. (2008). *Cartographic strategies of postmodernity: The figure of the map in contemporary theory and fiction*. Routledge.
- Morson, G. S. (1994). *Narrative and freedom: The shadows of time*. Yale University Press.
- Rosenau, P. M. (1992). *Post-modernism and the social sciences: Insights, inroads, and intrusions*. Princeton University Press.
- Shklovsky, V. (2017). Art, as device (1917/1919). In A. Berlina (Ed. & Trans.), *Viktor Shklovsky: A reader* (pp. 73–96). Bloomsbury Academic.





- White, M. (1992). Deconstruction and therapy. In D. Epston & M. White (Eds.), *Experience, contradiction, narrative and imagination* (pp. 109-153). Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. (2000). *Reflections on narrative practice: Essays and interviews*. Dulwich Centre Publications
- White, M. (2004). *Narrative practice & exotic lives: Resurrecting diversity in everyday life*. Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. WW Norton & Company.
- White, M. (2011). *Narrative practice: Continuing the conversations* (D. Denborough, Ed.). WW Norton & Company.
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. Norton.
- Willette, J. (2014, January 17). Michel Foucault: "This is not a pipe." *Art History Unstuffed*. Retrieved October 13, 2021, from <https://arthistoryunstuffed.com/michel-foucault-representation-pipe/>

