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The Potential of Texts Insane:

WRITING ABOUT INDIVIDUAL AND METAPHORICAL MADNESS[1]

INTRODUCTION

Writing about one's own madness can be scary in many ways. In my Master's thesis (Berlin 2019) I "confessed" that I use my own experiences of madness as material for my fiction writing, and at the same time my experiences (of madness and of writing) became research material for my study. The process and the dynamic of writing fiction differs from the process of writing non-fiction and academic texts. During these processes I had to overcome different kinds of insecurities and fears.

When writing short stories on the basis of my experiences of madness I had difficulties remembering my previous mad thoughts and especially reaching the logic of them, and sometimes I wasn't sure if I even wanted to, because it

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1 This article is based on my Master's thesis (Berlin 2019). In my thesis I studied writing about madness from the point of view of a writer, more specifically a writer who uses her own experiences as material for fiction. Taking into account both individual and metaphorical or collective madness, my emphasis is on texts that have certain ideological or ethical objectives.

felt painful and scary. I was afraid that I would "get lost" in my own madness and lose touch of reality again.

I am not sure whether the fear of descending back into madness was rational or not (although writing is a powerful tool), but the fear of social stigmatization is, even today, unfortunately still rational. In different cultures and times, different notions and qualities are associated with madness. In Finland, as in most Western cultures of our time, madness is often viewed as mental illness and perceived through a medical or psychiatric point of view, and seen as something that needs to be actively treated and cured – usually with the help of therapy or medication (see e.g. Pietikäinen 2013, 69, 130–131, 182).

A writer of fiction can fear her texts being taken "too seriously", as autobiographies and as evidence of her own madness. A writer of nonfiction, on the other hand, can fear her texts not being taken seriously enough. Writing my thesis I feared that openly identifying as "a mad writer" and telling about my experiences might damage my academic credibility. The value of experiential knowledge has been questioned by many, and when the source of experiential knowledge is mad, the value might be questioned by even those who normally appreciate experience as a worthy form of knowledge.

Rational or not, these kinds of fears reveal our understandings about and attitudes towards madness and non-madness. They can also help us understand how we read and interpret texts. Are authors being diagnosed on the basis of their writing? Is madness something that automatically damages the writer's credibility? Is madness a source of creative inspiration or an obstacle on the way of creating? Can a text as such be traced back to the writer?

In this article, as in my thesis, my interest is in *madness narratives* and *mad narratives*, especially the latter. Before I examine the difference between a madness narrative and a mad narrative, I must explain what I mean by madness. As I already indicated, I perceive madness as culturally bound: what is regarded mad is defined by the prevalent culture and age, its norms and values (see e.g. Pietikäinen 2013, 65). This kind of perception of madness as a cultural construct is typical to madness studies. In madness studies or mad studies, psychiatry and psychology are viewed from a larger societal, cultural, political and economic framework (Jäntti et al. 2019, 11). From this larger framework it is possible to see all the different powers in action when making definitions about madness. Consequently, in the heart of madness studies is a belief that madness as a phenomenon as well as everything linked to it cannot be adequately understood using just the language and concepts of psychiatry and psychology.

One area of interest for madness studies has been the cultural representations of madness (Jäntti et al. 2019, 11). The representations of madness in media, arts and other cultural products mirror our attitudes and views towards madness, and in turn affect us and our understandings. Stereotypes about madness can be harmful in spreading false notions about madness in general but especially about different mental disorders, and making madness more socially stigmatizing.

As a concept, madness unquestionably includes actual mental illness, but also much more. In everyday speech it is used to describe and explain all kinds of "abnormal" emotions and behavior – generally emotions and behavior found in others instead of oneself. My interest is not so much in what madness *is* but instead what it's like to *feel mad* in a certain time and culture, and how that experience can be conveyed through writing.

The basis for my study is self-identification as a definition of madness. I don't regard madness as something only medical experts can define. Using self-identification as a basis is also an ethical choice. Because of the social stigma of madness and the possible consequences of it, calling other people mad would be inappropriate and possibly harmful. My aim in using the terms "mad" and "madness" is to use them as means of empowerment (see e.g. Jäntti et al. 2019, 10–11).

In social studies and cultural studies, and especially when using possibly stigmatizing concepts like madness, it is important for the writer to position oneself towards the subject of study. My interest in madness stems from my own experiences of losing mental balance and starting to question my reality. I identify here as a mad writer. My identifying mad (and especially at this stage in my life when my mental state is balanced) could be questioned. I write fiction to understand (myself, my madness, this world) and to communicate my understandings to others. Even after regaining mental balance I am left with a fear of losing touch of reality again, as I have seen how fragile it is. Writing is an important tool for me to think, to process my feelings – and to exist in my reality. The incentive for my study was to understand better *my* process of writing and how to improve it. I wanted to examine how madness could be used in writing, does it have its own poetics, and how can non-mad people understand the “mad poetics”. Another incentive for my study and for this article was to communicate what I have learnt, and to make room for further studies and conversation on the topic.

I make a distinction here between individual madness and collective or metaphorical madness. By individual madness I mean mental illnesses and all kinds of symptoms and mental aberrations experienced by individuals. By collective or metaphorical madness I refer to madness and “madness” experienced by groups and larger communities of people, like societies and civilizations. The mental aberrations or symptoms of an individual might be regarded as a sign of a wider problem within a society or with a certain lifestyle. By collective madness I mean for example a trauma the whole community or society has suffered, like the trauma of holocaust. By metaphorical madness I mean “the Emperor’s clothes kind of madness” most people don’t see as madness (at the time of the happening anyway), an ideology or a lifestyle that *makes people mad*, for example the kind of madness that made the holocaust possible. In my opinion, mental aberrations often regarded as madness are usually warning signals of a mind trying to regain lost balance.

My intention here is not to expand the scope of madness to include evil or any kind of violence, but to include the kind of (shared) mental states, paradigms or thought patterns that allow things like that to happen. This kind of expanding is possible because madness is being examined from a wider perspective than just the conventional psychiatric or medical one. All in all, madness is not just about sickness/health, it is also about normal/abnormal and ordinary/strange.

Shoshana Felman (1985) writes in her book *Writing and Madness* about the discursive inflation of madness: it has become (and had already when the book was published) a popular topic, and confessing one's madness has become commonplace to the point that madness has in a way become ordinary. Madness becoming mainstream threatens to take away what is strange and alienating in it, the "outsideness" that is central to it. Strangeness and estrangement are fundamental features of madness: for the mad person what used to be ordinary becomes strange, and what used to be strange becomes ordinary. Writing and discussing about madness is burdened by a play of ordinariness and strangeness, closeness and distance: at the same time the mad person should be respected as other, as someone with her own unique experiential world, but at the same time she should not be seen as The Other, as someone completely different and thus incomprehensible.

The distance between madness and "normal" (whatever it is) and the mad person being outside of normal and thus the society might help her see things from a new perspective – and this is why arts (and mad narratives) have major potential in creating a change in society.

MADNESS NARRATIVES AND MAD NARRATIVES

There is no established term for what I call here *texts insane* or *mad narratives*. The term "madness narratives" has been used to refer to narratives that are about madness, but I found the term insufficient when trying to describe the possibilities of madness in writing.

A madness narrative is usually a story about individual madness, about individual experiences of living with mental illness. A story about madness can invite readers to identify with the characters and provide important information about madness, as well as peer support for other mad people. My emphasis here is however on texts that open up many interpretational possibilities, because I think they have different kind of potential in affecting people's attitudes and consequently the society. I am interested in texts that are mad not just openly on the plot level, but that also include madness in more complex and/or hidden and metaphorical forms, and these texts I call "mad narratives". They might be mad on the linguistic or structural level, and they are not (just) *about* madness, they *are mad* – or they do something to the reader to make her feel mad.

What I call a mad narrative is what Felman (1985, 252) calls "the madness of rhetoric" – the text's ability to shake its reader. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, and the rhetoric of a mad narrative has the ability to persuade the reader to "feel madness".

As I pointed out, writing *about* madness is burdened by the play of closeness and distance, ordinariness and strangeness. Both madness narratives and mad narratives are always cultural representations of madness, and reveal some of the values and notions we associate with madness in a certain time and culture. Interestingly, according to Felman (1985), madness as such cannot be represented: because it is outside of language and words, trying to represent madness *directly* always means its negation. Where there is words with construable meaning and coherent sentences, madness cannot be. Despite being unrepresentable, madness can be *manifested* in language and in text, but the subject cannot control its meaning. In other words, according to Felman, it is only possible to represent madness – its essence – *by chance*. (Felman 1985, 252.)

I can't say I fully agree with Felman, after all I acknowledge that my own madness is in the past, or in some latent phase, where I know madness, but not in this present moment – and still I think I might have a chance to somehow represent madness. However, Felman's statement becomes more understandable later on when we examine the narrative techniques and literary devices that comprise the mad poetics.

I intend to sketch here an outline for mad narratives approaching them through similar concepts. The difference between a madness narrative and a mad narrative is essentially in how they affect the reader. I will explain this in more depth, but first I will look into the different levels of madness in texts.

There can be madness on different levels of the text: on the level of plot, theme, language and/or structure. The text's madness can be explicit (the text is openly mad or about madness) or implicit (the reader concludes that the text is mad or about madness). Thematic madness of a text can be literal or metaphorical: the text can either be about individual madness (mental illness) or collective/metaphorical madness (madness or "madness" of a larger group).

Madness on the plot level means there is a mad character/protagonist whose madness is the topic of the story, and so the story is about individual madness. The reader can easily see what the text is about. The story can take place for example in a mental institute. A story that represents madness on the plot level doesn't necessarily have any "deeper" ethical or social ideology behind it – nor does it need to have one, because mad(ness) narratives can also “just” aim to be aesthetically pleasing stories. However, representations do always include culture-specific understandings and attitudes towards the things they represent, but also power.

When the plot is about individual madness represented through a mad protagonist but madness is also on the linguistic or structural level or both, there is a meta level of madness, where the protagonist’s madness has spread to the narration[2]. This creates distance between the reader and the text, but also a feeling of unreliability, which leads the reader to interpret that the theme of the text is not *just* individual madness, but something else as well, perhaps metaphorical madness.

It is easy for the reader to see if individual madness is the theme of the text (e.g. the unjust treatment of mental patients), but it is not always easy for the reader to make a distinction if the text is (also) about metaphorical/collective madness. When there is no madness on the plot level but madness appears on the structural and/or linguistic level of the text the reader can conclude that the text is either about individual or metaphorical madness on the thematic level: something has made the narrator/narration mad. In this case the reader might also just diagnose the narrator mad without thinking more about the possible reasons behind it (collective/metaphorical madness).[3]

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[2] I will discuss the symptoms of madness spreading to the narration more when I examine trauma fiction’s relation to mad narratives.

[3] Trauma fiction is usually like this: the symptoms of trauma will spread to the narration and the story is simultaneously about individual and metaphorical madness.

FROM NONFICTION TO TRAUMA FICTION

We can learn more about mad narratives by studying its "subgenres", for example trauma fiction. Mad narratives are not actually a literary genre, instead they can be studied as a reading strategy, and same goes for trauma fiction: it is not a solid genre of texts but a reading strategy to be used alongside with other strategies. As I will demonstrate, trauma fictions are mad narratives because of their theme and poetics.

The theory of trauma fiction draws from trauma theory, i.e. psychology and psychoanalytical theory. Trauma fiction theorist Anne Whitehead (2004) has studied the poetics of trauma fiction and described its conventions and special narrative features. Especially from an ethical and social perspective trauma fiction challenges both its writer and its reader(s) to think about the sustainability of their practices. As I will argue in more depth later, trauma fiction and all mad narratives can create new, more ethical ways of reading and interpreting texts.

Descriptive features of trauma fiction include the symptoms (of trauma or of madness) pervading the linguistic and structural level of the text. The textual symptoms are similar to the psychological symptoms of trauma (Whitehead 2004, 3–10, 81). According to Whitehead (2004, 84) key stylistic features of trauma narratives include intertextuality, repetition and fragmented narrator voice. Trauma fictions are fictions about madness. Trauma itself is at the same time (individual) madness and a reaction to (collective/metaphorical) madness.

Despite its name, at least not all trauma fiction can easily be regarded as fiction. Trauma fiction as a reading strategy often includes that the reader will expect to read about an actual event – and a genuine trauma. Trauma fictions can also be read as witness stories about traumatic experiences[4]. By telling about a trauma the author invites the reader to witness an event no one has witnessed before. A successful witnessing demands from the reader a different type of interaction with the text and its author. Because of trauma's special nature and the effect it has on memory and the individual's sense of time (trauma splits time into before/after), the traumatic event becomes reality for the traumatized herself only through language, and with the help of another person witnessing it. (Felman & Laub 1992.)

Trauma fiction is problematic in its potential to threaten the reader's sanity: Anne Whitehead (2004, 8–9) warns the empathetic reader about the threat of second hand trauma. Second hand traumatization is similar to trauma appropriation: in the same way than in a case of cultural appropriation, in trauma appropriation someone "steals" another person's trauma and makes it her own. In a case of trauma appropriation the first hand traumatized is left with her voice unheard as the attention shifts towards the second hand traumatized and her experience. In most blatant cases the trauma of someone else is turned into a product from which someone else benefits (other than the traumatized herself).

As I have stated above, trauma can be seen at the same time as a form of madness and a reaction to the madness around one, but madness itself can also be traumatizing. In my experience losing touch of reality can leave behind a feeling of reality as fragile or fake, and it can lead to the fear of losing one's mind again. Keeping this in mind, stories of madness can be read as testimonies of the experience of madness and everything that might follow (e.g. inhumane medical treatment). Feminist madness studies has had its emphasis on women's madness narratives and their power to work as testimonies. Women's madness narratives have helped to make visible the special features of women's madness, and the role of oppressive power structures in making women mad. (see Jäntti 2012, 40.)

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[4] The theory of testimony has mostly dealt with oral testimonies by Holocaust survivors. Consequently, the theory of trauma fiction has also been developed mostly with regard to the collective trauma of Holocaust through individual stories.

Narrative strategies utilized by trauma fiction do not radically differ from those utilized by other, more conventional texts, but the (psychological) effects of trauma intensify them. Because trauma has its own special features and effects on human mind, it cannot be narrated just through regular means of narration. Trauma fiction often utilizes the strategies of intertextuality, repetition and fragmented narrator voice (Whitehead 2004, 84). Trauma fiction is self-consciously metanarrative. It utilizes certain stylistic devices and narrative strategies in order to reflect and criticize its own contents. Metanarrativity is one of the features trauma fiction shares with other postmodernist and postcolonialist fiction (see Whitehead 2004, 81–82). The aesthetics of trauma fiction are shaped by the attempt to narrativize a trauma on the basis of fragmented memories and affects that escape language (Knuuttila 2006, 30).

Trauma causes a rupture in (an individual's perception of) time, and therefore it cannot be understood nor represented in conventional historical or cultural narratives

(Felman & Laub 1992, 21–29; Knuuttila 2006, 22–24, 27; Whitehead 2004, 84). In order to understand trauma, it is essential to understand the power trauma has on the present: how the past is intertwined with the present and how it affects the individual's ability to picture her future (see Felman & Laub 1992, 57–74). Trauma fiction utilizes metaphor and indirectness/ambiguity in its search for new ways of referentiality. The writers of trauma fiction often use supernatural and fantastic elements mixed with realistic elements (Whitehead 2004, 84). According to Whitehead (2004, 83–84), these ruptures in reality work as signals for the reader suggesting that there has been a rupture of the symbolic order, which prevents the reality from being represented in a conventional, more realistic manner.

The effect trauma has on the functioning of the traumatized mind raises questions about the limitations of human knowledge and memory. The traumatized may not have access to all the information and knowledge she in theory should have, because trauma affects brain functioning. Still, as Laub's (1992, 59–61) examples show, misremembering even one detail can bring into question the credibility of the whole testimony. When trauma fictions are read as witness stories of real traumatic events, they are being appointed with meaning and expectations bigger than other texts.

Witnessing is important for the traumatized individual in order for her to include the traumatizing event in her life story, but the exceptional relationship trauma witnessing has with the historical truth makes it important also on a larger scale. The expectation of extreme truthfulness placed on trauma testimonies does not take into account the shattering effects of trauma on memory and other cognitions.

Laub questions whether testimonies should be interpreted at all – maybe they should just be received, accepted and appreciated as they are. It can even be better if the reader/listener of the testimony has as little information as possible about the event beforehand, so she can receive the new information from a more neutral stand, without trying to compare it with what she already knows. According to Laub, the silences and the boundaries of knowledge can also work to testify, even of something that language and historical facts cannot. (Laub 1992, 61–62.) The theory of trauma fiction and testimony can provide tools for reading and interpreting all mad narratives.

As I have already discussed, testimonies are significant not just for the one testifying, but also on a wider scale. Testimony has historical and societal potential. Trauma testimony can prevent and break collective delusions and help societies open their eyes to see what is actually happening. Laub (1992, 83) uses the story "the Emperor's New Clothes" to demonstrate testimony's potential in breaking the collective delusion (about the holocaust):

> The emperor, though naked, is deluded, duped into believing that he is seated before his audience in his splendid new clothes. The entire audience participates in this delusion by expressing wonderment at his spectacular new suit. There is no one in the audience who dares remove himself from the crowd and become an outcast, by pointing out that the new clothes are nonexistent. It takes a young child, whose eyes are not veiled by conventionality, to declare the em-

> peror naked. In much the same way that the power of this delusion in the story is ubiquitous, the Nazi delusion was ubiquitously effective in the Jewish communities as well. This is why those who were lucid enough to warn the Jewish communities about the forthcoming destruction either through information of through foresight, were dismissed as "prophets of the doom" and labeled traitors or madmen. They were discredited because they were not conforming by staying within the confines of the delusion.

A mad character's (or the mad writer's) job can be to break the collective delusion. The mad person often has to say the things others can't or won't. Even just saying aloud things regarded as unconventional can cause a person to be labeled mad.

The critics of psychomedicalization have argued that features often regarded as madness (e.g. melancholy) are actually natural reactions to hardship – not something that necessarily needs to be treated and cured. According to Eric G. Wilson (2008, 150) "With no more melancholics, we would live in a world in which everyone simply accepted the status quo, in which everyone would simply be content with the given." Telling the truth – via testimony for example – can have an eye opening effect. The author can also work as a kind of an instrument of the testimony: by telling about the event that shook her private world she can actually come to testify of events of a much larger scale, about the culture, the society, her time (Felman & Laub 1992, 24).

Especially trauma narratives have been read as accounts of real events, and openly fictive (and especially alleged true stories revealed to be fictive) trauma narratives have been accused of fraud and appropriation. Knuuttila (2006, 31–32) points out that sketching out and making visible (and thus eventually conventionalizing) the poetics and strategies of trauma narratives can work against their power to work as testimonies: if some poetics of trauma fiction exist, then the effects of trauma on texts can easily be mimicked, which would erode the power of real trauma testimonies. This will also make trauma appropriation – stealing others' trauma stories – easier. From this viewpoint, listing the conventional strategies utilized by trauma fiction (even for "educational purposes") can be considered ethically problematic.

MAD NARRATIVES AND FICTION

I have already discussed the problematic relationship between trauma fiction (as a reading strategy) and fiction/nonfiction. Next I will examine mad narratives' relationship with fiction more widely.

Felman (1985, 14) begins her discussion in *Writing and Madness* with Foucault's idea that madness is essentially silence and the loss of language. She notes that madness seems to have a special relationship with literature and fiction. In a way madness can be seen as getting lost in one's imagination and as inability to separate factual from fiction, reality from dream. Because madness is a kind of fiction, it can only be represented through fiction and through metaphor.

The reader's interpretation of the text is affected by whether she reads it as fiction or nonfiction. I approach the question of the significance of fiction through *affective potential*. Mad narratives work to large extent by evoking different, often negative, emotions and affections in the reader. This can be done for example by appealing to the reader's own experiences and emotions (Nünning 2017, 43; Ovaska 2017). Essential for the affectivity of a fictional text is *perceived realism*, in other words the fiction's capacity to feel real (Nünning 2017, 39). The reader can recognize and interpret the emotions implicitly or explicitly represented in the text based on her real life experiences and her own emotions. The feelings and emotions must feel realistic for the reader to believe or even understand them, let alone for her to identify with them. According to Nünning, perceived realism affects how the reader engages with the text, how she builds empathy and to what extent the text can work as a tool for persuasion (Nünning 2017, 39). When the reader interprets emotions and affections through her own experiences, the feeling of realism comes from sharing and recognition.

Nünning (2017, 45) draws on previous studies and argues that fiction allows the reader to experience threatening feelings and situations from a safe distance. Concerning mad narratives or mad narratives this can have significant potential because madness in the text does not threaten the reader – physically nor her sense of self. Emotions evoked by fiction do not oblige the reader in the same way that emotions evoked by actual events might (Nünning 2017, 46). Facing madness in real life might evoke negative emotions like anxiety, fear or pity, and these emotions could cause the person to feel pressure to act on these emotions for example by trying to help the person or escaping the situation. Emotions evoked by fiction are usually free from this kind of mixing of emotions and social obligations. (Nünning 2017, 46.)

Fiction allows the reader to experience things that would otherwise be impossible for her in her reality but writing fiction makes this also possible for the writer. A writer can "re-write" her life story, which can be very important in healing after a traumatic event (see e.g. Hunt 2000, 101). Nünning (2017, 46) writes that "Especially for adults who [--] have little incentive to spend the cognitive effort and time to engage with unfamiliar people in strange situations, fiction can extend the scope of available experiences and enrich their knowledge about the way (unfamiliar) human minds work." Likewise, a mad narrative can work as a safe way for the reader to get new experiences and knowledge about madness. A text can be a safe place to face madness even when facing it in real life would feel too scary or self-threatening. This makes mad narratives potential in affecting especially the readers who have the least amount of willingness to face madness or mad people in real life, and who might have the most stereotypes regarding mental illness.

Some theorists think there are also downsides to fiction, and these downsides might be especially noteworthy with regard to mad narratives. Stefan Iversen (2013) has studied unconventional fictional narratives, by which he means broken and incoherent narratives – like mad narratives when the madness is in the structural or linguistic level. According to Iversen (2013, 160) we give fictional minds different ontological statuses, and these statuses affect what kind of strategies we use to make sense of unconventional narratives. Therefore unconventional fiction invites the reader to different kind of interaction than nonfictive one: the reader may not feel engaged enough to understand a character she reads as fictional, whereas if she thinks she is reading the story of a real person, she might have more empathy and willingness to understand a character even if she could not identify with him/her.

Iversen argues that the unconventional features of narratives, for example incoherence, are often interpreted through aesthetic norms and may thus get evaluated negatively. They are also often read as metaphors or allegories or accepted as unnatural and therefore impossible to understand. (Iversen 2013, 160.) It is possible that the reader will label the text "too mad" to be understood or interpreted. When we face the same unconventional features in nonfictive narratives (especially in trauma fiction and testimony) we react differently because we feel a social and ethical responsibility towards another person (Iversen 2013, 160).

FICTIONALIZING ONESELF

There are many reasons why a writer would want to fictionalize her experiences of madness for a text instead of "just" writing nonfiction. When the mad writer uses her own experiences of madness as material for writing, she might be forced to resort to fiction because of the cognitive effects of madness. Particularly powerful is madness's effect on memory, but different mental disorders have their own special features and effects, and some disorders might affect the writer's linguistic abilities more than others[5].

My own experience is that the logic of madness is similar to that of dreams: the meanings and connections between things can change unexpectedly, and what just felt natural and logical suddenly seems strange, especially when trying to communicate it to someone else using language.

The author's desire for her work to be read as fiction can most definitely be a way to protect herself and her loved ones. It can also be seen as a statement, denouncing oneself from the "culture of confession" and refusing to take on the stigma of madness.

In this study my emphasis is on the "mad writer", who writes autobiographical fiction or fiction inspired by true experiences. Celia Hunt (2000, 12) describes her definition of autobiographical fiction as follows:

> A type of writing that draws on personal memories and experiences, but does not necessarily attempt to portray the 'facts' of the past or the present; rather it seeks to convey the *essence* of these memories and experiences through the feelings and emotions associated with them, using the techniques of fiction and with a literary end product in view.

As Hunt, I am also interested in the essence of experiences and of madness rather than "pure facts".

Hunt writes about using one's own experiences as material for writing as *fictionalizing oneself*. Fictionalizing oneself and one's own experiences might have significant therapeutic potential. According to Hunt, fictionalizing can

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5 See e.g. about schizophrenia's impact on language use Covington et al. 2005.

help the writer to develop both as a writer and as a person. Fictionalizing or objectifying oneself helps the writer distance herself from her experiences in order to get a more objective view. (Hunt 2000, 84–86.) The writer should attain distance to different parts of the self in order to write about them in a more objective way: so that what started as “me” can in writing turn into “her” or “you”.

The therapeutic potential of fictionalizing ourselves is based on it allowing us face problems through metaphor. According to Hunt, fictionalizing oneself can help especially writers who have broken or fragmented view of themselves. Identity is not stable but ever changing, and problems with identity might affect writing in many ways. Fictionalizing ourselves can help us deal with different, sometimes contradictory sides of our personalities and identities. (Hunt 2000, 84–86; 90.)

Especially for beginning writers it might be difficult to let go of the critic within and to explore one’s creativity freely. Getting in touch with one’s subconscious requires letting go of too much control. Hunt draws on previous studies and concludes that “shelfing the critical faculty” and immersing in one’s imagination might lead to a momentarily feeling of losing oneself. Therefore a writer must have a strong sense of self, so that temporarily losing oneself would not feel too threatening. Hunt links the writer’s ability to regulate different parts of the self with polyphony. She thinks that working with different parts of the self is essential for polyphonic writing in the sense that Bahtin described. (Hunt 2000, 39–40.) I will discuss polyphony and its relation to mad narratives in more depth later.

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY MAD NARRATIVES

Next I will discuss some of the narrative strategies utilized by mad narratives. The following strategies are not typical to just mad narratives but are utilized by different kinds of texts as well, and especially science fiction and other subgenres of speculative fiction utilize similar strategies. Some narrative strategies can even be seen characteristic for all texts that have a social or ethical ideology behind them.

Speculative fiction and mad narratives can sometimes intersect. These umbrella genres both use fantastical and supernatural elements to deliver a story, and sometimes madness on some levels of the texts may lead the text to be read as speculative fiction. Both genres question our shared reality and dare to imagine what could be behind it. Speculative fiction stories often have certain worldviews or ideologies that are represented distanced using a more or less fantastical parallel worlds or realities.

One big difference between mad narratives and speculative fiction is that whereas the worlds of speculative fiction have been created for the story, the fantastical elements of mad narratives can at least partly be, or have been, reality for the author or someone else. The worlds of mad narratives are usually similar to our empirical world despite including fantastical elements. Another difference is consistency: while consistency is crucial for speculative fiction (Suvin & Canavan 2016, 42), mad narratives can follow the logic of dreams, and things can change their form suddenly and unexpectedly. Mad narratives can be (and almost characteristically are) chronologically inconsistent, fragmented and seemingly illogical.

But not *anything* can happen in mad narratives either, although it might seem like that for the reader – especially if she has no experience of her own of madness. It can seem that because there is a breakage in time/reality and consequently the textual structures, everything is mixed and upside down, but actually madness and the mad narratives work using their own, dream-like logic. The mad narratives combine fantastical and illogical elements to fiction in a way that leaves the end-product looking more like realism than fantasy.

By using fantastical elements the writer can tell a story with a strong ideology or even sharp critique but still without preaching or finger pointing (Sinisalo 2004). Both speculative fiction and mad narratives utilize *estranging* or *alienating* as textual strategies. Madness and the mad narratives have a peculiar relationship with estrangement, as I will demonstrate in the following.

ESTRANGEMENT

Estranging from oneself or from reality is descriptive to madness. In the long history of madness, especially followers of the anti-psychiatric movement have thought of madness as an (unconscious) attempt to break away from an alienated system – from this perspective actually what is mad is the system, and not the one estranging from it (Pietikäinen 2013, 385). Estrangement or some kind of feeling of "outsideness" is also common for many artists.

The Russian formalists were the first ones to write about estrangement as a poetic or narrative strategy. According to Viktor Šhklovsky (2001), estranging could even be the purpose of art, because the arts should work against the automatization of perception. Through estranging it is possible to present things from a new angle, almost like they were seen for the first time. Estrangement for Šhklovsky is above all something that makes perception slower and more difficult, so that the consciousness has time to set in instead of automation.

Also Bertolt Brecht, who has adapted the theory of estrangement into theatre, suggested that estranging the viewer from the play forces her to be active and process what she sees and perceives. This activeness lets the viewers form their own opinions and conclusions instead of accepting passively what they are told (by the writer/narrator/characters/society). According to Brecht, estrangement can help evoke emotions in the viewer, but these emotions are not identical with the emotions of the characters. In other words, the viewer can’t identify with the character and empathetically adopt their emotions, but instead react with their own true emotions to what they see. (Brecht 1991, 127–128.) Brecht emphasizes the importance of estrangement especially when the play includes social criticism. In the case of socially conscious art, the artist (or the actress) should retain the distance between her actual self and the character she is portraying, so that the viewer could better understand the content and the meaning behind it, and to comprehend the historical and social nature of what is presented to her. (Brecht 1991, 128–130.) For Brecht as for Šhklovsky, estrangement is about slowing down the process of perception and allowing the reader/viewer to receive the work of art in a conscious and reflective manner. The reader/viewer should always keep in mind that what she is receiving is a *representation* of reality, not the reality itself.

Writing about one's experiences of madness requires some distance from them, but at the same time it works as a means to get more distance. By writing and making visible (sharing) my own anxiety, my painful memories and traumas, my delusions, I am giving them form and making them something else than "just" my thoughts, my feelings, what's inside my head. Writing them out can give them more weight and help take them more seriously, but the writer can also choose to take them less seriously and say: look at these ridiculous thoughts I have. Look at all this madness[6].

A mad narrative can estrange its reader in many ways depending on for example the reader's relationship with madness: does she herself identify as mad, or does she see madness as something completely *other* and outside of herself? Metafiction, one feature of mad narratives, works as an estranging element as does the possible unreliability of the (mad) narrator. Madness on different levels of the text affect differently the text's capacity to estrange the reader: if the text only includes madness on the topic level in the shape of a mad character, then it will most probably invite different kinds of readers to identify with it than texts that include madness on the structural or linguistic level. The text only needs to be understandable and evoke empathy for the reader to identify with its mad character. Structural or linguistic madness, however, can even scare the more unexperienced readers. Interpreting the structural or linguistic madness requires competence and knowledge used in choosing different reading and interpretation strategies. An unexperienced or incompetent reader might feel helpless and give up on interpreting the text or even categorize it as too difficult to be understood.

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[6] This of course requires some grip on shared reality. In some illnesses it may be impossible to distinguish delusions from reality.

Mad narratives operate largely on the alienating effect of madness, whose effect and function depend on which level(s) of the text the madness and estrangement appear. The estranging effect of madness emphasizes reality's nature as a social construct. There is no one "The Reality" that is same for everybody: reality is build performative and linguistic way, on certain norms, laws and rules. The deviant nature of the mad, their alternate realities, force us to see what kind of things we regard as normal, natural or self-evident.

Estrangement is about distance between the reader and the text, but also between the reader and the reality. A text estranges its reader (momentarily) from her reality, if not by other means, then at least by inviting her to immerse in another reality for the short time of reading. The downside of the estranging nature of madness is that it can easily estrange the reader from the text itself, making empathetic identifying impossible and reading thus potentially uninteresting. Alienating the reader from the text can be an unwanted consequence of bad writing, but it can also be something that the writer sets out to do in order to make a desired effect. As I have shown above, with trauma fiction comes the threat of second hand trauma and trauma appropriation. Alienating the reader (from the text and its protagonist) can be the writer's conscious attempt to prevent the reader from appropriating a trauma – or to draw attention to the social position of the mad as *others*.

This is what I suggested in my Bachelor's thesis (Berlin 2017) where I studied Laura Lindstedt's novel *Oneiron* and its representations of gender using trauma fiction as a reading strategy. I argued that trauma affects how masculinity and femininity are represented in the novel. *Oneiron* portrays both individual and collective trauma, especially the trauma of holocaust and of the sexual abuse and violence faced by women. There are seven main characters in *Oneiron*, all women, who find themselves in an empty space the seconds after death. From a trauma fiction perspective especially interesting is the story of the youngest protagonist, Ulrike.

The effects of trauma on narration are the most distinct in Ulrike's story. The cause of her death is revealed (to the reader but also to the protagonist herself) through repetition and allusions. The reader is tricked to think that Ulrike was killed by her boyfriend while she was trying to break up with him, but in the end Ulrike remembers she was actually raped and killed by a random truck driver. Ulrike's memories of being raped and strangled come up repeatedly throughout the story in different forms. In the opening scene where Ulrike appears in the white space surrounded by the other women, she is practically[7] raped (again) by them. This scene is narrated using alternating focalization: at first, the person appearing in the white space and being raped seems to be the reader, who the narrator addresses as "you". After the rape, the woman tells the others (and the reader) her name, and after that, she is addressed as "Ulrike". In other words, *the reader is raped* by the six protagonists before the focalization changes and she gets torn away from the story back to where she actually is, outside of the (other women's) story. The writer can invite her reader in to the story's world and then kick her out to remind her that she is not a part of the story.

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[7] In the novel, what the other women do to Ulrike is not dealt as rape. The women think they are doing her a favor by giving her a last orgasm before she loses the ability to feel bodily sensations.

POLYPHONY

Mihail Bahtin (1991, 20) has used the term *polyphony* to describe a new genre or type of writing created by Dostoyevsky, where multiple voices equally co-exist in the text. According to Bahtin, Dostoyevsky succeeded in creating an equal dialogical position with respect to other voices in his texts (e.g. narrators and characters). Bahtin emphasizes the positive activeness of this new author position: the author is always present in the text, but without overpowering the other consciousnesses, and without turning them into passive objects. The relationship between the author and the consciousnesses he creates in his texts is equal, dynamic and dialogical. (Bahtin 1991, 99–106.)

The dialogical nature of polyphony is especially important with regard to the text's ideological content. In a polyphonic text the author's views about the characters and the world are not the "truth", but the truth is constructed dialogically in the process of the author's interaction with his characters and the reader processing what she reads. (Bahtin 1991, 99–106.) Polyphonic or dialogical novel activates the reader in the same way estrangement does, because she is forced to make her own conclusions based on multiple points of view or "versions of the truth" instead of being offered one to be taken in passively.

According to Bahtin (1991, 106–107), the polyphonic novel can potentially expand both the author's and the reader's consciousness. Thinking about the polyphonic novel having "multiple equal voices or consciousnesses" and its ability to expand consciousness one begins to wonder if madness would have something to do with polyphony.

A study by Luhrmann et al. (2015) showed that the way schizophrenics experience hallucinations and delusions is affected by the prevalent views and beliefs of a culture. People experiencing auditory hallucinations have different ways of reacting to and dealing with their hallucinations, and these ways seem to be related to cultural understandings about individuals and their relation to others and the world. (Luhrmann et al. 2015.) Perhaps the auditory hallucinations are not just random voices created by a troubled mind, maybe they could also be seen as inner dialogue or negotiation with cultural values, attitudes and worldviews.

I suggest that madness has a special relationship with polyphony, and that the mad writer has – because of this mad "inner dialogue" of hers – a better readiness to write polyphonic texts that are tuned in for hearing different perspectives and maintaining a dialogic relationship with them. In addition to hallucinations, obsessive-compulsive thoughts, anxiety, addictions and unresolved traumatic memories and inner conflicts can cause a person to struggle with different parts of herself in a way that can incidentally train her to write polyphonically.

AMBIGUITY AND THE UNCANNY

In a mad narrative the symptoms of a mental disorder can "spread" to different levels of the text. In consequence the text can become fragmented or its narration can become filled with gaps and repetition. In addition mad narratives are characterized by ambiguity of rhetoric, and a special relation to intertextuality and metaphor (see e.g. Whitehead 2004). These features together form the "core" of the mad narratives, that strangeness which makes the texts work *performatively* (Felman 1985). The ambiguity of rhetoric is an important feature also from the point of view of the ethical and social potential of the mad narratives. I will use Freud's term *uncanny* to demonstrate the effects of ambiguous rhetoric in representing madness.

Freud (1919) has used the term *uncanny* to describe the feeling we get when we suddenly come across something that is at the same time strange and familiar. According to Freud, uncanny is similar to the feeling of helplessness we sometimes experience in our dreams. The experience of uncanny is intrinsic to madness because madness is characterized by familiar (e.g. own body or thoughts) becoming strange and strange becoming familiar (e.g. hallucinations).

Repetition often causes uncanny feelings, because it fills ordinary things with strange meaning, and makes them seem suspicious or ominous. According to Freud, supernatural elements can also cause the feeling of uncanny, but only if they appear in a realistic context. A fantastical story cannot produce the uncanny effect because it happens in a fantastical world, and therefore the reader will not question her own reality. In summary, uncanny is felt only if the reader starts to question her reality. Fiction has more potential in producing the uncanny effect than reality. The author can trick her reader into thinking that the laws of reality are in effect and then surprise her with a strange element in order to produce the uncanny effect. (Freud 1919, 9–10.)

The feeling of uncanny can efficiently convey the experientiality of madness. Madness itself is uncanny: mad behavior makes a familiar person suddenly feel scarily strange. Madness detected in someone else always reminds us of the possibility of our own madness. The feeling of uncanny can demonstrate the reader what it might be like to lose one's mind. A mad narrative can potentially (or at its worse) give the reader a momentary feeling of losing their mind.

Because madness has a special relationship with language and metaphor (see e.g. Covington et al. 2005; Kähmi 2015), mad narratives can convey meanings in a way that requires special processing and interpretation from the reader. When reading a text that is ambiguous the reader can't be sure if her interpretation is "correct". A narrative filled with gaps and ambivalence demands the reader to use different reading strategies to make sense of what she is reading. The reader is also forced to resort to her previous experiences of reading and of life, and to reflect her own memories and feelings into the text (Ovaska 2017, 365, 375). In a sense the reader is forced to reflect into the text her own madness, the dark side of her own mind. This is where fiction comes to save the reader from actually losing her mind: because reading/construing madness from a text happens from a distance and through metaphor[8], the reader can only read the kind of madness that already exists in her reality (even though hidden or unconscious), the kind of madness she is ready to face.

Nevertheless, the reader does not have to have own, personal experiences of madness or certain feelings in order to understand them. Narratives can help readers understand emotions and experiences they have not experienced themselves (Nünning 2017, 31–33).

All kinds of texts aim to appeal to the reader's feelings and to evoke certain expectations and emotions in order to keep her reading, to identify with the characters, to feel empathy, and so on. Feelings and emotions are central to madness, and different illnesses have their own special relationship with feelings. Feeling too intensively or lacking emotions can be symptoms of madness.

Anna Ovaska (2017) has analyzed fictive depression narratives from a phenomenological-cognitive perspective. She is interested in fictional narratives' ability to convey the experientiality of depression. She argues that through language and narration it is possible to evoke the kind of affects, emotions and bodily feelings in the reader that invite her to identify with the changes in affectivity descriptive to depression (Ovaska 2017, 365). By appealing to the reader's own feelings and experiences the author can evoke in her memories of previous emotional and bodily feelings (Ovaska 2017, 376–377).

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[8] See Kähmi 2015, 134–148.

According to Ovaska fictional depression stories can provide the kind of experiential knowledge that nonfictive texts cannot. This is possible through different techniques and literary devices utilized by fiction rather than nonfiction. (Ovaska 2017, 376–377.) Fiction can help us understand the relationships between things, and how different experiences affect the individual's perception of herself, of others and of the world.

Fiction's ability to convey emotions through emotively charged words, metaphors, symbols and references (associating) is particularly interesting with regard to mad narratives (see Nünning 2017, 38). Again I will use *Oneiron* as an example. I have argued[9] that *Oneiron* plays with the reader's expectations and misleads her by building certain (partly unnecessary) "threat of masculinity" by utilizing narrative strategies like repetition and intertextuality. Ulrike's story reveals she was thinking about leaving her boyfriend and had developed feelings towards a much older colleague. Ulrike's feelings towards this mysterious man, Ulrich, are in the narration contrasted with the love stories of dictators like Mussolini and Hitler. If the reader has to construct emotions and meanings from an ambiguous text, she needs to have certain competences and knowledge in order to understand what is implied. In this example, in order for the threat to build up, the reader firstly needs to know who were Mussolini and Hitler and secondly to associate Ulrich with them, but she also needs to feel empathy towards Ulrike in order to wish her the best.

Not all mad narratives aim to evoke positive emotions, empathy or identification. As I have already mentioned, evoking negative emotions in the reader might be what the author wants. The text can even cause the reader to become traumatized or depressed herself (see e.g. Zimmerman 2007). If the reader is not ready to face the negative emotions (the madness in) the text evokes, then she is likely to label either the author, the narrator or the text too difficult.

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[9] Berlin 2017, 10.

CONCLUSION

Above I have shown some evidence that fiction might be the best or even the only way to represent madness, although turning to fiction is not completely unproblematic. I have examined the ethical, political and societal potential writing about madness can have. I have introduced some aspects of how mad narratives can work performatively and how they affect their readers. By appealing to the reader, inviting her to feel things like empathy or alienation, and by forcing her to actively process what she reads and how she aligns with it can hopefully further affect societies and their ethical atmospheres. Madness can still cause social stigmatization that brings about more unnecessary suffering, but by raising awareness and growing empathy literature can affect our views and attitudes.

Madness is by definition outside of language and reason and thus difficult to represent and narrativize. It seems that madness as such cannot be represented, but something of its essence can be conveyed through writing. In the end, reading madness in a text largely depends on the reader and her readiness to receive “new wavelengths”. The same applies to the ideological content of the text: it can only be interpreted within its context, and to be able to interpret it the reader must have certain competences.

Mad narratives can just aim to be entertaining and aesthetically pleasing, but there is no reason why a mad writer should just stick to writing to herself. Writing can have therapeutic potential that is important for the writer, but a writer can also use her own story as a basis for fiction and learn how to use fiction and different narrative strategies in order to inform others about her reality. Experiences of what it's like being outside of "normal", outside of society, and outside of language can provide useful information not just about madness and how it affects individuals, but also how madness can affect our collective views of reality. Mad narratives raise questions about the limitations of human knowledge and memory. They also have the potential to question reality and to reveal what we consider to be normal or natural.

Writing about individual madness can have - in addition to therapeutic potential for the writer herself - potential in changing people's attitudes towards madness. It can also change the ways we read and interpret texts, for example by changing the expectations we have of fictive and non-fictive madness narratives. Writing about collective and metaphorical madness can have potential in breaking the "collective delusions" and changing radically our attitudes and perceptions of our customs, our norms, even our time.

Studying mad narratives opens up new perspectives on madness and on writing about madness. Writing unfolds as an active process with political and ethical implications. Studying mad narratives can provide more information on how we read and interpret texts. The texts can help reveal our own attitudes towards madness, but also towards writing and literature more widely.

Keeping the ethics of writing in mind, it is important to note that despite being responsible for her words, not all the voices and opinions represented in the text can as such be traced back to the author. Writing fiction is largely about taking on different roles and characters – even madness can be a role taken on by the author during writing.

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KEYWORDS

Creative writing, madness, mad narrative, fiction, estrangement, polyphony, psychoanalytical literature theory, trauma fiction, madness studies.