

Too Mad to be True IV
Madness and its Expressions

**Fourth edition of the international conference on the
philosophy of madness and the madness of
philosophy**

**Gent, May 14-15, 2026
Museum Dr.Guislain
Jozef Guislainstraat 43B
Gent -Belgium**

**All speakers
Abstracts and short biographies**

Ben Alderson-Day (keynote speaker) - *The Presence of Madness, and the Madness of Presence*

Feelings of unseen presences are abundant in accounts of psychosis and states of unreality. But does madness itself have a feeling of presence? And what can the experience of felt presence tell us about madness more broadly? From Strindberg's "Unknown" to Paul Kingsnorth's Beast; and from Bertha Mason to The Octopus Man, the presence and possibility of madness often loom large before other things begin to change. In this talk I will explore how fear, personification and lost agency intertwine to bring presence to madness, drawing on accounts from literature, film, first-person perspectives and clinical research. I will also talk about how feelings of presence across a spectrum of situations almost all touch on aspects of madness, in ways that illuminate the deep complexities of self and other.

Ben Alderson-Day is a Professor of Psychology and Co-Director of the Discovery Research Platform for Medical Humanities. A specialist in psychosis and psychopathology, his works spans psychology, psychiatry, philosophy and cognitive neuroscience. From 2012-2022 he was a member of Hearing the Voice, Durham University's interdisciplinary investigation of voice-hearing (or auditory verbal hallucinations) and in 2024 he became Scientific Chair of the International Consortium on Hallucinations Research. In 2023 his book "Presence: The Strange Science of the Unseen Other" won the British Psychological Society Book Award for Popular Science.

Fieke Bakker - *Hypomania as a liminal experience and mythic integration*

Hypomania, here taken as an altered state of heightened euphoric or elated mood, is typically framed within the psy-disciplines as a symptom of psychopathology. In this sense, hypomania is seen as a disorientation from "sane" or "normal" functioning. Challenging or nuancing this framework, this study adopts a Religious Studies perspective to instead reimagine hypomania as a liminal experience and as a potential site of existential meaning making. Existential meaning-making is defined as a process of orientation towards visions of the good life, a life worth living. Our orientation towards the world may be disrupted by disorienting life events and needs to be made narratively coherent again by integration in the self-story. Through the analysis of nine in depth interviews, this study examines how participants narrate hypomanic episodes as transformative junctures in their personal narratives. Findings reveal that participants frame hypomania not as disorientation but as an existential feeling, a mode of being-in-the-world characterized by feelings of physical vitality, existential optimism and a sense of "acute enchantment" with the world. Finally, I have argued that by incorporating this liminal experience in the life story, it gains a mythic character, both showing a worldview and maintaining a liminal openness to other possible worlds.

Fieke is trained as a spiritual/existential counsellor and religious studies scholar, with a fascination for spirituality and mental health she aims to approach this subject through research, practice and art.

Tatiana Baxter and Sohee Park - *Felt Presence, Psychosis-Risk, and Spirituality in the General Population*

Felt presence (FP) refers to the subjective experience of sensing someone or something without clear evidence. Past research suggests that spirituality and psychosis-risk are associated with FP experiences but quality of FP (vividness, emotional valence, and frequency) may depend on context in which they occur. Little is known about qualities of FP in relation to multiple intersecting contexts. Sensed Presence Questionnaire was administered with follow-up questions about frequency, vividness, distress and positive feelings associated with FP. Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) and Prodromal Questionnaire-16 (PQ-16) were also administered. Based on DSES and PQ-16, participants were divided into four groups: high-risk/high spiritual (n=54), low-risk/low spiritual (n=56), low-risk/high spiritual (n=104) and low-risk/low spiritual (n=123). Frequency, distress and intensity of FP were associated with increased psychosis-risk and spirituality. The high-risk/high spiritual group

reported highest number of FPs and experiences were frequent, distressing, and vivid. Unexpectedly, positive feelings during FP were more closely linked with psychosis-risk than spirituality. Though FP is relatively common in the general population, qualities depend on context. Intersectionality of multiple contexts including spirituality and psychosis-risk is under-studied. Specifically, the possibility that spirituality intensifies distress and minimizes positive aspects of FP among individuals at increased risk for psychosis merits further study.

Tatiana Baxter is a Doctoral Candidate at Vanderbilt University in the Park Body, Mind, and Brain Lab.

Sohee Park is the Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at Vanderbilt University. She will hold the Gutenberg Chair position at the University of Strasbourg in 2026

Emma Brijs - *Coconuts' Making Room with Madness: on Alienation, Connection and Art in Psychosis*

Psychosis often entails a radical disruption of meaning, language, and relationality. This paper explores Coconuts, a creative collective in Flanders founded outside the walls of institutional psychiatry, where people with and without lived experience of psychosis collaboratively write, create, and publish a magazine. Drawing on Duff's notion of enabling places (2015), the study examines how such an in-between space can sustain processes of reconnection, care, and subjectivation. Based on one year of participant observation, interviews, and a focus group, the analysis reveals three interwoven dynamics. First, within the inside space, creative practice and encounter generate belonging and rhythm; freedom and containment coexist in an atmosphere that transforms suffering into expression. Second, the outside space manifests through the magazine and its public presentation, granting symbolic legitimacy by reintroducing participants as creators rather than patients. Finally, the movement between both spaces enables a form of "quiet activism": art as testimony, critique, and reconnection. Coconuts thus emerges as a fragile yet vital structure, reimagining recovery as relational and creative rather than corrective. In doing so, it restores the right to speak, to create, and to belong: making room with madness rather than against it.

Emma Brijs is a PhD researcher at Ghent University studying creative collectives and psychosis through psychoanalytic and phenomenological lenses. Her work explores art, atmosphere, and recovery beyond clinical frameworks.

Alan Bristow (keynote speaker) - *Paranoid Reading for Paranoid Writing? On the Possibilities of Mad Knowledge*

Psychoanalysis has a long and checkered history with respect to its engagement with the written expression of madness; Sigmund Freud's initial theories of 'Dementia Praecox' based on Daniel Paul Schreber's Memoirs, Victor Tausk's seminal paper on James Tilly Mathews and his 'influencing machine', Carl Jung's engagement with Babette and lastly, Jacques Lacan's controversial utilization of the written prose of 'Aimee' to name but a few. All of which raise a series of urgent, provocative and eminently political questions relating to the way mad writing, or paranoid text has firstly, been identified to be worthy of any analytic gaze and, secondly, how it comes to be subsequently interpreted. Yet, we also find a series of critiques leveled at psychoanalysis from an array of different intellectual or philosophical positions. Many of which have also had recourse to the written expression of madness to state their case. R. D. Laing's anti-psychiatry as well Deleuze and Guattari's Schizoanalysis, being the more notable examples. However, this series of interpretations and attempts to derive knowledge from the written expression of madness also reveals to us something about the paranoid nature of all knowledge acquisition. Adopting the work of Eve Sedgwick and her notion of 'reparative reading', as well as Lacan's earliest thoughts on 'paranoiac knowledge', I will demonstrate how the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' underwriting many critical reading practices, ones adopted by

psychoanalysis and beyond, actually mirror the very paranoid processes they purportedly wish to unearth. By focusing on this taught interrelation between knowledge creation, critical interpretive practices and paranoid modes of reading, I will ask if the analytic gaze has anything left to offer ethical and progressive ways of understanding, or resistance to understanding, mad experience.

Alan Bristow has been a practicing Psychiatric Social Worker for the NHS in London for the past two decades. He primarily works with those experiencing psychosis subject to legal detention. In 2020 he received his PhD from Birkbeck College, University of London on the topic of mad writing drawing from Lacanian Psychoanalysis, continental philosophy and mad studies. A forthcoming book from Palgrave, Paranoid Knowledge (2025), further expands on these research interests. His forthcoming publications primarily relate to advancing a philosophical critique of digital MH technologies, computational psychiatry and their application for wider clinical practice.

Bavo De Bleckere - *From Freedom to Veracity: Exploring the Experience of Language in Schizophrenia: A Longitudinal Mixed-Methods Study*

Throughout the history of psychiatry, schizophrenia-spectrum disorders have been regarded as among the most severe psychiatric conditions (World Health Organization, 2025). Disturbances at the level of language have, for over a century, been advanced as a central factor in understanding schizophrenia (Covington et al., 2005). This tradition begins with pioneers Kraepelin (1896) and Bleuler (1911) and was subsequently taken up by multiple theorists in attempts to grasp the nature of schizophrenia, often from categorical diagnostic ideals (Schneider, 1950; Andreasen, 1986). In contemporary research, the emphasis on disturbed language in schizophrenia remains prominent. Such linguistic anomalies are frequently reduced to deficits at the level of thinking and are further framed within the logic of “formal thought disorder” (Roche et al., 2015). Recent models grounded in these principles claim to establish a clear distinction between clinical and non-clinical populations based on disruptions in language. However, these (computational) models often approach language as an isolated entity, detached from the “speaking being” (Vanheule, 2013) and from its experiential context (Sass, 2017). This third-person perspective aligns with a predominantly deficit-oriented view of psychiatric phenomena and proves insufficient at this juncture. In the present study, we propose to reinterpret these models in light of the phenomenological and psychoanalytic traditions, departing explicitly from the first-person perspective on language. This perspective will be investigated through a mixed-methods design, examining the experience of language longitudinally by means of semi-structured phenomenological interviews (EAWE and EASE) alongside open-ended Experience Sampling Method (ESM) questions. Through this framework, we aim to gain insight into how language develops in schizophrenia and whether it functions as a matrix of subjectivity (Benveniste, 1958). The project emphasizes the importance of the dynamic relationship between selfhood, language, and subjective experience as a crucial condition for developing an ecological understanding of language in schizophrenia (Fuchs, 2017; Feyaerts & Sass, 2024).

Matt Bodett - *Stolen Mad Aesthetics and the Making of Modern Art*

This talk looks at how modern art took proof, techniques, and visual language from mad people while pushing them out of authorship and history. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, drawings and writings made by mad individuals circulated through asylums, medical journals, and exhibitions. These works were framed as raw, instinctive, or unintentional. When similar forms appeared in modern art, they were praised as innovation or genius. Mad expression became a resource rather than a voice. Citing typically unnamed mad authors and artists this talk will focus on their contribution to cultural labor. This talk argues that mad creativity was used without credit, consent, or material return, by looking at debates around Art Brut, Outsider Art, and modern aesthetics. Mad work stayed visible, the people did not. By reading aesthetic theory alongside asylum archives and early art criticism, the

talk shows how madness was valued for its look while mad people were denied agency. It asks what changes when mad aesthetics are recognized as authored work rather than material to be taken and reframed.

Matt Bodett is an artist, writer, and founder of the Center for Mad Culture. His work focuses on madness, aesthetics, and cultural appropriation through visual art, poetry, publishing, and research.

Pavan S. Brar - *Phenomenological considerations of the varieties of suicidality*

In psychiatry and clinical psychology, suicide is typically understood in terms of trans-diagnostic constructs such as hopelessness and thwarted belonging. A phenomenological perspective of psychopathology, however, calls into question the limits of an understanding of suicidality in terms of general causal factors. In phenomenological psychopathology, a central notion is that of a core gestalt or trouble *générateur*: the underlying disturbance inherent to a psychiatric condition that unifies its features and symptoms. If the experiential context in which symptoms arise is qualitatively distinctive to particular psychiatric disorders, researchers may ask whether the suicidal drive itself emerges differently within each such gestalt. In order to pursue this question, this paper takes a comparative phenomenological approach. Turning to the writings of artists such as Antonin Artaud and Ian Curtis, individuals who grappled with the question of suicide, it will be demonstrated how suicidality can arise in distinct and disorder-specific transformations in temporality and the lived-world. Implications of these analyses for suicide research and treatment will also be considered.

Pavan S. Brar is a postdoctoral researcher in clinical psychology at Ghent University. He received his Ph.D. from Duquesne University and was previously a post-doctoral fellow at Cambridge Health Alliance in the Harvard Medical School. He specializes in phenomenological approaches to psychopathology, especially Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders, and suicide. He also has broader interests at the intersections of psychology, philosophy, and the arts.

Fabiola Camuti, Judith Leest, Renske Tiemersma and Tess Jones - *Artistic Research as Epistemic Care: Neurodivergent Knowledge in Arts Education*

This presentation draws on neurodivergent-led artistic research residencies conducted at the professorship Critical Creative Pedagogies (HKU University of the Arts Utrecht). This approaches arts education as an ecology in which sensory, relational, and epistemic conditions are actively shaped rather than assumed. Informed by the frameworks of epistemic justice, the neurodiversity paradigm, and care ethics, the residencies position lived neurodivergent experience as a legitimate source of artistic knowledge. The works – presented live during the session – engage materiality, sensory intensity, discomfort, silence, and relationality as modes of knowing that emerge through practice. Rather than representing madness or neurodivergence as an object of reflection, these practices think with neurodivergent experience, allowing alternative aesthetic logics to unfold through embodied and relational encounters. One residency explores tactility, material fetishism, and bodily distortion through wearable artworks that invite physical engagement, approaching discomfort as a shared and navigable condition rather than pathology. Another residency centres community-building as an epistemic practice, drawing on the HKU Iets Eten autistic community to trace how shared practices of care – such as eating together – generate situated knowledge about belonging. Together, these projects demonstrate how artistic research can enact epistemic justice in practice, expanding what counts as (artistic) knowledge within neuroinclusive arts education.

Fabiola Camuti (she/her), Ph.D., Professor of Critical Creative Pedagogies, HKU University of the Arts Utrecht. She conducts research and teaches on artistic research, pedagogies of care, participatory arts, neuroinclusive arts education.

Judith Leest, Ph.D., is Senior Researcher (Professorship Critical Creative Pedagogies, HKU University of the Arts Utrecht), focusing on neuroinclusive arts education. She is also research & policy advisor.

Renske Tiemersma is a visual artist and neurodivergent maker. She completed her Bachelor of Fine Art at HKU University of the Arts Utrecht in 2024.

Tess Jones is a British-Dutch designer based in Utrecht, the Netherlands. In 2023, she graduated from HKU University of the Arts, where she studied illustration.

Max Casey - *The Ouroboros and the Spiral: On psychotic Anti-humanism*

This presentation will unpack what Wouter Kusters once called the “antihuman tendency in extreme philosophical and psychotic thought.” Madness pushes thought beyond its bounds into radically a-human territory, but in ways that certain forms of philosophy have long explored. Eugene Thacker argues that, in the same way that our bodies are made up primarily of foreign organisms, that “thought is not human.” In Lacanian psychoanalysis, what we think of as the human subject presupposes the profoundly alien force of language. At the same time though, if all humans are constructed by the anti-human, what is it exactly that makes the psychotic or mad subject different? Why are mad people bothered by symptoms such as thought insertion or mental automatism when all thought is inhuman and impersonal? This presentation will tackle how the mad subject engages with the always inhuman aspect of thought. This engagement creates less a coherent image of the inhuman of the Other than a kind of *mise en abyme* effect, where thought refracts both in and out of itself. The presentation will examine this psychotic a-human thought as a simultaneous spiralling inward toward self-consumption and a spiralling outward beyond subjective borders.

Max Casey is a PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, currently on exchange at Ghent University. Their work explores the intersection of psychosis and desire.

Willem Daub – *Crossing Borders*

With mathematical and philosophical exercises I lead people to the borderline between, argumentative Aristotelean philosophy and imagistic Platonic spirituality. The transition – preferably forth and back – they have to perform themselves. By quietly observing the memory track of their previous thinking processes this memory track ‘lights up’, becomes eidetic, acquires image character. It becomes apparent, that behind our argumentative thinking progresses a continuous stream of thinking movements. This is not a disturbing phase. It is still not disturbing when, by diligently practicing, these thinking movements, these conceptual gestures, gradually transform into images, getting enriched into archetypes or even worded, spoken messages. Why is it not disturbing? Because you enter these zones of transmutation at will, fully controlled. Which is not the case in what we call madness. In madness, when you judge that all the police cars are intent on following you, you may not be able to return to a normal argumentative modus, although a friendly companion may help you to do so. By quietly observing the memory tracks of your thinking you may learn to discern between your own thoughts and sudden thought-intrusions, because you will notice that their gestures run parallel to your own thoughts, and so do not become compulsive.

My very first years were spent in a Japanese prison camp on Java, Indonesia. After high school I studied physics, a bachelor, and philosophy, a bachelor. I translated the philosophy discussions for Dutch TV, Ayer-Naess, Popper-Eccles, Chomsky-Foucault. There followed 25 years as a teacher of mathematics, physics, architecture, bookbinding, landscape surveying and religion in Waldorf schools. Then I started a study Philosophy of Science, and finished it with a master degree.

Ricky Derisz - *Spiritual Psychosis and the Path to True Sanity*

To invert this year's theme, I will explore how spirit expresses itself as “madness” and why spiritual psychosis is an opportunity for R.D. Laing's true sanity — a “new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer.” Once spiritual psychosis is underway, attempts to return to “conventional” sanity are too restrictive. Spiritual psychosis is an awakening: to the unconscious and its archetypal dimensions; the mundus imaginalis or imaginal realm; and the non-dual nature of consciousness. To navigate this expanded state, a number of discernments must address the risk of “mad distortion” without eradicating the authentic spiritual experience. These include:

- Discerning synchronicity from delusions of inference or confirmation bias.
- Discerning gnosis or personal epiphany from shadow complexes.
- Discerning between symbolic and literal interpretations (of dreams, inner experiences, or life events).
- Discerning shared from unshared experiences.
- Discerning mystical unity from dissociation or loss of self.
- Discerning an ego in service to the divine vs. an ego identifying with the divine (causing inflation or God complexes.)

These discernments cultivate true sanity whilst addressing the potential pitfalls of mad distortion. The result is an ego in service to the divine, no longer its betrayer.

Ricky Derisz is an author, podcast host, and the creator of MindThatEgo, home to an expansive view of mental illness and spirituality. Inspired by a fusion of psychology, spirituality, philosophy, science, and personal experience, Ricky's quest is to understand mental illness in the context of spiritual awakening.

André Domenici - *Social alienation and mental disorder*

This paper investigates the contemporary conflation between social alienation and mental disorder, arguing that this conceptual overlap obscures the lived meanings of both phenomena and contributes to the medicalization of socially rooted suffering. Drawing on Daniel Certcov's dialectical psychopathology, phenomenological psychopathology (Jaspers, Tatossian, Messas), and contemporary critical phenomenology, I propose a framework for distinguishing qualitatively psychopathological alterations of consciousness from forms of distress that emerge as responses to oppressive social, cultural, and ecological conditions. The analysis is expanded by incorporating Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance and alienation, as well as recent developments in critical phenomenology. By situating psychopathology within the intersubjective, cultural, and institutional textures that shape human experience, the paper shows how “madness” can both reflect pathological transformations of the lived world and express forms of resistance or breakdown provoked by structurally alienating conditions. This distinction has significant implications for clinical practice, preventing the pathologization of politically meaningful suffering while avoiding the reduction of genuine mental disorders to mere social dysfunction. Ultimately, the paper argues for a phenomenological-ethical stance in mental health that recognizes madness as a phenomenon distributed across biological, experiential, and sociocultural dimensions, and that resists its uncritical capture by biomedical or sociological reductionisms.

André Domenici is a Psychiatry Resident from Porto Alegre, Brazil, specialized in Phenomenological Psychopathology and pursuing his master's degree in Philosophy. He also loves literature, coffee and his chihuahua, Minkowski.

Cynthia Dorrestijn - *Dance paralysis – about movement and psychosis*

This lecture is about movement, dance, and psychosis. First, I describe how I usually improvise dance to music. Then I talk about what happened to me during a ballroom dancing class. As always, I was immersed in the collective movement to music. Suddenly, I became acutely aware of how everything was connected and I froze. I couldn't dance anymore. It turned out to be part of the run-up to my first psychosis. Later, I experienced psychosis two more times. Dance also played a role during the recovery. Shortly after the third episode, I tried to relearn an old choreography in a dance studio. What I saw in the mirror was a rather stiff and staccato affair. It took a while before dance moves started to feel natural again. I compare my experiences with accounts by other dancers, such as Gil the Grid, and I try to find clarifications in philosophy about corporeality and movement.

Cynthia Dorrestijn MSc studied Design for Interaction at Delft University of Technology. She has experienced psychosis three times. Since 2019, she teaches dance classes on a weekly basis.

Sibylla Endres, Caroline Philippart and Kae Eichel - *Between Retraumatization and Revolution: For a Radically Independent Future of Peer Support*

Peer support is portrayed as an innovative practice, yet its institutionalization has tied it to the very structures it once sought to resist. The employment of peers in the lowest pay categories reinforces existing power dynamics, positioning them in roles without decision-making power, and leaves little room for mad narratives. Peers risk retraumatization because their experiences are not sufficiently integrated, and not adequately understood, since respect for life is not taught in healthcare training. From our lived experience, madness acts as creative force and catalyst for transformation: an opening with healing potential, not a crisis to be contained. Madness challenges the medical narrative and threatens institutional legitimacy. Drawing on mad studies and antipsychiatry, we examine how madness reflects socially tabooed issues, and how “normalcy” operates as mechanism of social control. How can we imagine new forms of support and care? Is a new ideology enough, or must we begin with ourselves: reconsidering our own approaches to existing hierarchical institutions, adopted to secure a better standard of living, and instead examining our values, our capacity for relationship and love, our tolerance and commitment to being human? How can peer support remain independent and initiate a powerful and sustainable change? If not us, who? We know what transformation means.

Sibylla Endres, Berlin-based, psychosis and hearing voices experienced, peer and somatic experience trauma therapist. Worked nearly ten years in Soteria Berlin. Independent research focused on altered states and voices. Engaged in mediation and zen-archery.

Caroline Philippart, Belgium-based peer supporter and educator. Caroline is currently working to be independent from the Mental Health Industrial Complex by imagining new forms of care. Engaged in community building and home cooking.

Kae Eichel, Berlin-based psychologist and psychotherapist, teaches systemic therapy at Greifswald University. Their research focuses on relationship anarchy, meta-science, and mental/sexual health. Kae is engaged in feminist activities and in Sickness Affinity Group.

Sabine Færge - *Naming the Wild Duck: When the Rumpelstiltskin Effect Turns Self-Deceptive*

Levinovitz and Aftab recently formulated the theory of the Rumpelstiltskin Effect, capturing the enduring insight that naming our suffering can itself be therapeutic. The “power of naming” can reduce shame, validate experience, and strengthen the therapeutic alliance. However, we highlight here that the Rumpelstiltskin Effect conceals an ethical tension that warrants deeper scrutiny. We hypothesize that the therapeutic effect of naming is at least partly mediated by lay conceptualisations that stem from scientific misconceptions about the biomedical nature of psychiatric diagnosis. Naming a condition turns the unnameable nameable and the chaotic ordered by reducing complexity to

simplicity – an illusion or a life-lie that may bring relief, yet also fosters self-deception and a loss of meaning and agency. This duality confronts clinicians with ethical dilemmas between truth and illusion. Based on the play *The Wild Duck*, we therefore propose four ethical positions, two utilitarian and two deontological, which aim to help clinicians foster humility in handling – and getting a clearer picture of – when naming heals and when it harms.

Sabine Færge is an early-career researcher at the Copenhagen Research Centre for Biological and Precision Psychiatry. Her work bridges biological psychiatry, lived experience, philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of science perspectives.

Nikolas Fascendini - *Primary delusions in schizophrenia and the sacred: a qualitative study*

Psychopathology has long emphasized the pivotal role of revelation in schizophrenic primary delusions; however, empirical investigations of this phenomenon remain limited. This study aimed to explore the fundamental forms of subjectivity underlying delusions in schizophrenia and to compare the experiential structure of these phenomena with experiences of the sacred. Eleven participants diagnosed with schizophrenia were recruited, and data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Participants' accounts revealed four core experiential themes: (1) fragility of presence, (2) disposition to delusion, (3) apophany, and (4) eccentric existential reorientation. Primary delusional experiences appear to constitute a state-like phenomenon unfolding through four structural phases leading to the formation of delusional content: (1) a weakening of bodily resonance with the world, (2) the predominance of “physiognomic” properties, (3) the imposition of idiosyncratic and self-referential meanings, and (4) their active elaboration into delusion-like ideas. Formal similarities emerge with numinous experiences and with manifestations of the sacred, or “hierophanies.” Disembodiment may represent a shared underlying structure in both schizophrenia-related delusions and sacred experiences, although it is persistent and imposed upon the subject in the former, and transient, voluntarily sought, and socio-culturally integrated in the latter.

Nikolas Fascendini: Consultant psychiatrist focused on early psychosis prevention, integrating phenomenology, anthropology, and cognitive archaeology into an interdisciplinary approach to psychopathology.

Nathan Fernandez - *Credibility, Care and The Making of Madness: Long COVID in India*

Long COVID in India has produced a population whose cognitive and sensory impairments persist beyond biomedical certainty and outside institutional willingness to sustain care. This presentation argues that Long COVID produces a contemporary condition of being rendered mad, not through diagnosis, but through systematic disbelief, forced psychologisation, and epistemic estrangement. Drawing on secondary neuropsychological literature on post-viral cognitive dysfunction, fatigue, attentional instability, and dysregulation, I demonstrate that these impairments are patterned and reproducible, yet routinely dismissed as anxiety, weakness, or lack of effort. In the Indian context, this dismissal begins not in clinical settings but within families and communities, which often serve as the first sites where fluctuating capacity and invisible symptoms are morally judged. Situated within Mad Studies, this analysis extends epistemic injustice toward epistemic estrangement, defined as the loss of both credibility and interpretive refuge. This condition is particularly urgent in India, where family structures mediate access to care and survival. When epistemic collapse occurs at this level, suffering becomes isolated, unshareable, and structurally inaddressable. This presentation insists that Long COVID in India must be recognised not only as a medical concern, but as an urgent Mad Studies problem involving power, exclusion, and the production of madness.

Doctoral scholar and clinician-scientist-activist researching Long COVID in India, focusing on epistemic injustice, neuropsychological knowledge production, social implications, and autoethnographic narratives of suffering within global health and disability studies.

Andreas Flaminio - *Madness in the newspapers: my daily dose of anguish*

I see a lot of “hidden messages” in the newspapers, YouTube videos, movies, etc. Usually, they involve so-called responsibility and guilt for something “which has happened in my name”: e.g. war, conflict, famine, fallen governments, car accidents, airplane crashes, etc. There is a “secret conspiracy” which brings this all about, because they say that I’m some kind of “world leader,” even if I don’t want to be one. I suffer a lot because of it. For the coming conference, I want to make a collage of some of the articles in the newspapers which I perceive as “hidden messages.” I hope to make this visually appealing, but madness will do the work. I will also tell the chilling story behind it and then connect it with the philosophical ideas of what underlies things, what cannot itself be said but can only be “shown.” Interesting philosophers in this context are Wittgenstein and Derrida, who talk about separating sense from nonsense (Wittgenstein) and the margins and the blanks of the texts, which irrevocably convey meaning to the interpreter (Derrida). It will be a personal story about spies, patterns, shadows, concealment, etc., which only come to life in my own imagination.

I’m Andreas Flaminio, 38 years old, and I live with a residual form of schizophrenia and other related disorders.

Jason Grant-Rowles - *From Inpatient to Lived Experience Expert: A Decade of Transformation in Mental Health Systems*

This presentation explores the role of lived experience expertise in mental health, drawing on my personal journey from inpatient service user to Lived Experience Expert over the past ten years. I begin by defining lived experience in its contemporary usage, highlighting how the concept has shifted from passive patient narratives to a recognised form of specialised, practice shaping knowledge. Using my own positionality as the core narrative thread, I trace my progression from becoming an Expert by Experience within my local mental health trust to taking on public facing responsibilities within the Department for Work and Pensions. I outline my subsequent transition into academia at the University of Manchester, my work within Early Intervention Services, and my roles as a practitioner, researcher, and advisor, culminating in my acceptance onto a PhD programme. Through this trajectory, I argue that people with firsthand experience of mental illness possess essential insights that can meaningfully inform service design, research priorities, and policy development. Expanding opportunities for lived experience leadership is crucial if mental health systems are to deliver the compassionate, effective, and person-centred outcomes that we all want to see.

Jason is a lived experience practitioner, researcher, and advisor trying to increase outcomes for others within the mental health system. Currently exploring how to improve informed consent within schizophrenia research.

Amanda Häkkinen - *“I Am... The Anorexia”:* Anorexia Nervosa as a Process of Subjectivation

This paper examines anorexic subjectivity through Michel Foucault’s framework of subjectivation, understood as the dual process by which individuals are both constituted by and constitute themselves within structures of power. While anorexia is typically conceptualised in medical discourse as a pathological disturbance of body image, and in feminist scholarship as either a rejection or hyperconformity to femininity, these models insufficiently account for the ways individuals actively fashion themselves as anorexic subjects. Drawing upon Foucault’s fourfold schema of ethical self-formation – ethical substance, mode of subjection, practices of the self, and telos – this paper argues

that anorexia operates as a destructive yet ethical and aesthetic project of self-formation. Through close readings of autobiographical accounts, including Marya Hornbacher's *Wasted* (1998) and Susan Burton's *Empty* (2020), I demonstrate how anorexics cultivate and evaluate themselves according to the moral logic of anorexia, wherein ideals of control, restraint, and purity define ethical worth. Conceptualising anorexia as a Foucauldian form of subjectivation reorients analysis from pathology toward agency, illuminating how anorexics negotiate, internalise, and resist the discursive and institutional forces that define them. Ultimately, the paper opens space for therapeutic approaches that engage anorexic agency.

Amanda Häkkinen (they/she) is a doctoral researcher in Philosophy at the University of Helsinki. Their doctoral dissertation develops an alternative philosophical perspective on anorexia as a form of subjectivity.

David Hanneuse - *Our Time Together - A Participatory Rehearsal of Nothingness*

This performance centres on a drawing, *Our Time Together*, made over five years of chronic pain and Jehovah's Witness aftershocks. It condenses those years onto paper; only the image shows versions of me, struggling until I became a stranger to myself. The work grows out of multiple osteochondromas and a history of body–mind pain. There is no fixed self, only shifting identification; psychiatry calls this psychosis, and art, music and sound give it structure to be lived rather than refused, with sound gradually revealing the absence of a solid "I". Rather than fleeing suffering, the piece stays close to it, trusting the body's capacity to reorganise through ancient vocal practices of breath, vibration and reverse phonation. Without a teacher, I found my way into droning chanting that quiets thought and "sings" my inner country into existence, recognised in Aboriginal songlines and in Francis Bebey's overtone singing, where song keeps a world alive. We begin with box breathing in four groups and a chamomile infusion. Vocal drones open into harmonics while a didgeridoo line works, echoing traditions first met in Kowanyama. Beside us, a 3D reconstruction of my hip bones plays. Only then do participants encounter the drawing as a field, before hearing my narrative, engaging madness in aesthetics and religion.

David Hanneuse: Artist with multiple osteochondromas, a Jehovah's Witness past and psychotic states where body and mind are inseparable; for him, song and art are breath keeping country around the loosening 'I'.

Liorah Hoek - *Exploring experiences of plurality*

In this paper presentation we will go into a close reading of the so called "Meet the Alters" genre of YouTube videos posted by people with plural identities. By analysing performance, aesthetic and linguistic choices we not only get a clear picture of how people with plural identities experience themselves, but also how their understanding differs from psychiatric understanding of the condition. This epistemic shift opens up new possibilities when thinking about identity, personality and madness.

Liorah Hoek (she/they) is a PhD candidate in Disability Studies and Mad Studies at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht. She works together with artists with plural personalities.

Matthew Jackman - *Mad Genealogies: Multiplicity, Polyphony, and the Beauty of Madness*

This presentation draws from my PhD on the International Mad movement(s), where I develop a genealogical method rooted in Mad (studies-theory) methodology and survivor epistemology. Through a close textual analysis of Mad-identified authors across six centuries—including Margery Kempe, Elizabeth Packard, Frantz Fanon, Kate Millett, Sascha DuBrul, Sonny Jane Wise, and Jazmine Russell—I trace how madness has been narrated, contested, and reclaimed as knowledge. Rather than treating these writings as pathology or testimony to illness, I read them through the philosophical eyes

of the Mad. Madness here appears as multiplicity, polyphony, and mystery: nonlinear “Mad time,” contradictions that refuse resolution, and revelations that destabilise reason while opening possibilities for beauty, survival, and transformation. The genealogy foregrounds epistemic humility—embracing what cannot be fully explained, and valuing madness as both wisdom and excess. In doing so, it affirms madness as lived philosophy: a way of knowing that unsettles established categories while generating new imaginaries of resistance, community, and pride. As a Mad Pride manic depressive, I position this work as both scholarship and Mad expression—an invitation to honour madness not only as experience but as a vibrant intellectual and political tradition.

Matthew Jackman is a Mad scholar-activist, psychiatric survivor, and PhD candidate at the University of Sydney researching the International Mad movement(s), genealogies of madness, and survivor-led knowledge-making.

Kristína Janačková - *Even in My Delusions I Have to Do the Dishes: Feminist Speculations on Delusional Experience*

Are delusions gendered in terms of their content, their structure, or not at all? In popular culture, psychosis is understood and depicted very differently depending on identity categories such as gender, class, and race (consider the “crazy cat lady”, the “genius mad mathematician”, and numerous other stereotypes). By contrast, philosophers of madness often presume that delusions transcend social location and that, while they may be influenced by things like gender at the level of content, their structure is practically gender-neutral. In this presentation, I will focus on some gendered aspects of delusions, drawing on from my own lived experience. My aim is not to show that women experience delusions in a fundamentally distinct way from men. In fact, there is a very real risk of essentialism and a careful interrogation is needed in order to avoid harmful claims about the relationship between psychosis and gender identity. Instead, I will argue that feminist theory can help us to appreciate the nuanced role that historical and sociocultural forces play in shaping the delusional experience.

Kristína Janačková: Writer and activist. She studied Literary and Cultural Theory and works at the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences in Tübingen, Germany.

Grietje Keller - *Book presentation Gekkenkennis. Inleiding in Mad Studies (in Dutch)*

The book ‘Gekkenkennis. Inleiding in Mad Studies’ introduces Mad Studies to a Dutch audience as a social and political discipline. The book criticizes the medical model and explores the social model of disability in a Mad context. Grounded in Grietje Keller’s own lived experience with the psychiatric system, this work explores the concept of sanism (structural discrimination based on perceived sanity) and advocates for the reclaiming of “Mad” (*Gek*) as a political identity. Inspired by Gender Studies the author examines the history of diagnostics, the relation of Mad people to the labor market, and the entrenchment of racism and heteronormativity within mental health care. The book serves as both an academic introduction and an emancipatory guide for those seeking their own words outside the clinical gaze.

Grietje Keller organizes since 2014 Mad Studies reading groups at Stichting Perceval. As of 2025, she is a PhD candidate researching the lived experiences of people who used adhd medication during their youth.

Eirini Ketzitidou Argyri - *Standing in Groundlessness: The maddening pluripotency of meaning*

Through early creative work exploring characters who lose conviction in a single, stable reality I embarked on an exploration of the paradox of groundlessness — what happens when our perception of reality’s ground falls apart? Years later, this question took the form of empirical research into psychedelic experiences that unsettle ontological certainty. This paper traces that trajectory: from

imaginative inquiry, through lived encounter, to systematic engagement with the phenomenon of ontological disruption. Drawing on qualitative interviews with individuals navigating destabilising psychedelic experiences and practitioners supporting their integration, I examine what the meaning pluripotency of psychedelics might reveal. We will explore how ontological destabilisation can unfold into psychological transformation, existential re-orientation, or prolonged crisis – and shifts between. We see how the phenomenology of such states often overlaps with understandings of psychosis, depersonalisation, derealisation, and how the trajectory of the experiencer relies on relational, cultural, and interpretive scaffolding. Challenging the binary separation between “madness” and “sanity,” this work suggests that much of the suffering associated with madness may reflect contextual failures to support ontological diversity. How are experiences of madness co-constructed in our worlds? What determines whether we grow from groundlessness?

Eirini Ketzitidou Argyri (Arket) is a researcher whose PhD examined ontologically challenging psychedelic experiences and transformative learning. Her work bridges psychology, philosophy, community-based integration and harm-reduction initiatives.

Azra Khan - Diagnosing Her Disobedience: What Will Not Obey Is Made Mad

This creative, fictional performance explores female madness as a cultural construct shaped by patriarchal, social, and institutional norms across time. Through a two-part narrative, it examines how women’s resistance, distress, and trauma have been reframed as pathology rather than contextually understood. Part one is set in the Victorian era and follows a woman incarcerated in an asylum after seeking divorce. Her refusal of domestic obedience is labelled hysteria, illustrating how medical authority colluded with moral and legal systems to discipline female autonomy. Madness here functions as a cultural technology, enforcing gendered norms under the guise of care. Part two shifts to present day, following a woman diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder after sustained trauma. Despite contemporary clinical language, she encounters suspicion, dismissal, and punitive responses from healthcare systems and peers. The narrative highlights continuities between historical and modern frameworks: how credibility is denied, emotions are moralised, and distress is individualised. Together, these scenes position madness as a mirror of culture, revealing how gendered power structures shape both the expression and interpretation of suffering. By blending fiction with cultural critique, this piece invites reflection on what has changed, and what has endured, in how female madness is imagined, named, and governed.

Azra Khan is a Mad activist, writer and artist in Edinburgh, co-director of Centre for Mad Culture UK and Collective Advocacy Worker for the Oor Mad History project.

Catharina Koerts, Lieve Carette, Sanne van Driel, Grietje Keller, Liorah Hoek and Annemijn van der Schaar - Mad Studies reading group on zines

Mad Studies understands madness not as an individual pathology, but as a social, political, and cultural construct. In this interactive session we invite participants to experience how Mad Studies reading groups function as collective spaces for critical reflection, community building, and producing collective shared knowledge based on lived experiences. We begin with a brief introduction to the pedagogy and practice of Mad Studies reading groups, drawing on over ten years of experience, our own academic reading group, and a recently developed practical guide for organizing such groups by Stichting Perceval. Instead of reading an academic text, for this session we will delve into zine-making as a creative form of mad knowledge production, crafting contention and exchange through accessible and diverse formats. Zines allow for fragmented, non-linear, and affective expressions of madness. Experiences that often contest clinical language or academic coherence. After reading part of a zine together, participants will create individual or collective zine pages, experimenting with text, image,

and form, or contribute to a shared manifesto emerging from the session. This session explores Mad Studies reading groups and zines as alternative epistemic practices that challenge dominant psychiatric narratives and foreground collective meaning-making, creativity, and resistance.

Mad Studies Galore, an academic Mad Studies reading group will lead this session. Members include Sanne van Driel, Grietje Keller, Lieve Carette, Annemijn van der Schaar, Catharina Koerts and Liorah Hoek.

Joël Kuiper - *Changing Consciousness: Insights from Psychosis and Philosophy*

This talk examines whether severe psychiatric episodes can clarify what consciousness is and how it changes. I draw on my background in AI for biomedical science together with personal experience of type-1 bipolar disorder and three severe psychoses. These episodes showed, from the inside, how a lived world can destabilise, reorganise, or collapse entirely. Across philosophy and neuroscience, theories of consciousness vary widely. Physicalist, functionalist, predictive-processing, panpsychist, and idealist approaches offer very different starting points, with no shared view of what consciousness consists of or what counts as an explanation. This lack of agreement becomes a problem when we try to understand what actually changes during psychosis. Psychiatry measures symptoms, networks, neurotransmitters, and risk factors. These are useful correlates, but they do not give a mechanistic account of how a conscious world transforms. The gap between measurable biology and lived phenomenology becomes especially clear during episodes where meaning, selfhood, perception, and agency shift within hours or days. Psychosis therefore raises basic questions. What changes when a sense of reality reorganises? Why can consciousness move so quickly between different experiential states? And what kind of theory could link biological processes to these shifts in subjective life?

Joël Kuiper is a scientific programmer with a background in AI and biomedical informatics. His technical work and lived experience shape his philosophical interest in how conscious experience changes.

Antonino Danilo Landolina - *thEoReticO\$. A religious adventure to find faith, virtue, and, most of all, Love.*

Theoreticos is a literary and philosophical account of what it means to live with and after psychosis. Written in the form of a fragmented diary from adolescence to adulthood, the work explores how delusions, love, guilt, and redemption combine to form an inner search for meaning and connection. Through a constant tension between reason, imagination, and empathy, the book sketches not only a personal story of recovery but also an existential reflection on how the mind attempts to organize reality when it falls apart. Theoreticos connects art, philosophy, and psychiatry in a single narrative experiment in which language itself becomes the means of healing. In this way, it aligns with the conference's themes—the thin line between madness and truth, between the personal and the universal—and invites us to understand psychotic experience not merely as a disorder, but also as a catalyst of meaning-making. Theoreticos is currently not scheduled for publication.

Antonino Danilo Landolina (30) is a master student of philosophy at the University of Ghent. After suffering from psychosis, he wrote Theoreticos, a book that attempts to make the alienation and loneliness of the experience understandable and palpable.

Rita Sousa Lobo - *Manicómio Project: Madness and Art in Therapy*

This presentation will explore a Portuguese initiative entitled “Manicómio” (“Asylum”), launched in 2018. The project integrates two decades of psychiatric hospital experience with the broader art and

cultural sectors, embracing the concepts of both madness and freedom. Its founding objective is to challenge the stigma attached to art produced by individuals with mental health conditions, underpinned by the belief that recognizing and valuing such expressions of madness is both innovative and progressive. This concept has evolved, and by 2025, it expanded into a network of unexpected and artistic spaces. From this vision, Open Therapy emerged as ground-breaking approach, offering psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy sessions in unconventional and inspiring locations, such as renowned art museums and galleries, thereby reshaping not only access to mental health services but also the setting where therapy takes place. While this presentation will briefly address the project's structure, its primary focus is on sharing my professional perspective as a therapist conducting sessions in these distinctive settings. Additionally, it will include patient testimonials regarding their experiences and examine how the immersive setting can influence the manifestation of psychological distress and suffering. Keywords: Manicómio, Open Therapy, Madness, Art, Immersive-Setting

I have been practicing as a psychotherapist in Lisbon, Portugal, for the past 20 years. I hold degrees in Philosophy and Clinical Psychology and am recognized as a Specialist in Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, with training as both an Individual and Group Psychoanalyst. I am a Full Member of the Group Analytic Society International and collaborate with ArgLab at NOVA University of Lisbon. My primary research interests include the study of altered mental states in individuals and groups, human relationships, and the interaction between humans and technology within the field of psychotherapy. In recent years, my focus has increasingly centered on psychotherapy for psychotic spectrum disorders, major depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder.

Pablo López-Silva - *A Phenomenologically-based Approach to the Demarcation Problem between Delusions with Religious Content and Religious Beliefs*

For some clinicians and philosophers, the existence of delusions with religious content (RD) involves the challenge of distinguishing religious delusions [qua beliefs] from religious beliefs (RB). Dominant views within current cognitive neuropsychiatry tend to approach this demarcation challenge by focusing on the epistemic profile of delusional beliefs i.e. they examine how, in virtue of their content, delusions work when confronted with evidence, how they guide action, and how they are integrated into broader belief-networks in the person. After examining some of the most fundamental aspects of this view, in this presentation I propose that, although helpful in some respects, this approach is insufficient to properly distinguish RD from RB. Instead, I propose that a phenomenologically-based approach is in better shape for such a task due to the way in which it is able to make sense of the pathological constellation and trajectory in which DB unfolds. From this point of view, RD are symptomatic of a general transformation of reality that encompasses the embodied, embedded, and intersubjective structure of consciousness. In addition, I explore how Gallagher's Multiple Realities Hypothesis could be able to offer theoretical support for the way in which phenomenology informs the demarcation problem between RB and RD.

Pablo López-Silva: Clinical Psychologist; MRes and PhD in Philosophy (Manchester, UK); Professor of Psychology, School of Psychology, Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile. Senior Research Fellow, Development in Cognition and Language Research Centre, UV-Chile. International Partner, Collaborating Centre for Value-Based Research, University of Oxford, UK.

Kathleen Lowenstein - *Mad Bioethics: Thinking Bioethics Informed by Mad Studies*

Standard approaches to madness within bioethics focus primarily on questions of deficit or lack—raising questions such as whether someone has the capacity to refuse care or how to best respond to treatment nonadherence. In contrast, critical mental health perspectives, such as Mad Studies, center the perspectives of individuals identified as mentally ill, and ask how our understanding and framing

of madness itself impacts both what questions are asked as well as how we respond to these questions. In so doing, they offer an avenue for rethinking core considerations in bioethics, such as understandings of capacity and agency. Building on these points of intervention, this presentation will discuss ways in which Mad Studies can inform our understanding of ethical responses to madness and distress, as well as address wider questions of what it might mean to do Mad philosophy more broadly. In so doing, it will argue that Mad-informed ethics serves as a crucial point of intervention against standard narratives that discount, or only partially include, the perspectives of individuals identified as mentally ill.

Kathleen Lowenstein is a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University whose research focuses on the ethics of mental health and illness, particularly how critical perspectives can inform conceptualizations of ethics.

Tanya Marie Luhrmann - *The Architecture of Spiritual Experience*

In this I present our work on spiritual presence events: phenomenal experiences which are understood by the perceiver to be evidence of gods or spirits. We draw on four large datasets (total N = 2381) collected in the US, Ghana, Thailand, China, and Vanuatu, including participants from a range of religious backgrounds. We find that these events are surprisingly common, with over 80% of participants reporting having experienced at least one of these events. At a higher level of analysis, reports of spiritual events exhibit a strikingly robust structure: Across all cultural settings, para-ordinary events—in which ordinary experiences of thoughts and feelings are attributed to an external source and interpreted as experiences of a spiritual nature were reported at higher rates than outer sensory events, such as visions and voices, and voices and visions are always more common than spiritual smells and taste. Mere presence events—moments when someone has the sense that an invisible being is present in a nearly tangible way—were also reported more commonly than outer sensory events across all cultural settings, sometimes as commonly as para-ordinary events. Local culture and religion appear to shape but do not fully determine the architecture of spiritual experience.

Tanya Marie Luhrmann, PhD. is the Albert Ray Lang Professor in the Stanford Anthropology Department, with a courtesy appointment in Psychology. She has spent many years studying spiritual and psychiatric experience.

Julia Macintosh and Matt Bodett - *Mad Culture: what is it, what it does, and why it matters*

In this talk we will explore madness as culture. Culture is the shared way of life, including beliefs, customs, arts, law, language, traditions, values and behaviours that characterise a particular group. Culture is learned and passed down through generations, and reflects both individual identity and collective understanding. We will argue that framing madness as culture, and the celebration and preservation of mad culture and mad lineage, substantially enrich the broader community. Moving madness beyond the binary of mental health/illness allows us to perceive madness as a contribution to the human experience rather than a problem to be fixed or a deficit to be resolved. In doing this we offer mad voices a chance to confront cultural erasure and show how collective culture is understood through material acts of revision, who controls those acts, and how mad knowledge persists when it is allowed to speak on its terms.

Matt Bodett is an artist, writer, and founder of the Center for Mad Culture. His work focuses on madness, aesthetics, and cultural appropriation through visual art, poetry, publishing, and research.

Julia Macintosh is the Founding Director of the Centre for Mad Culture UK, a trustee of ISPS UK and a member of the Asylum Magazine editorial collective.

Edith Mayorga Saucedo - *Entropy: the process of mental disorder. Parrhesia as a defense*

A mental disorder is a process that includes first-person experience. One day you realize you are not the same anymore: the process was invisible, and the illness has taken hold, eclipsing your world. In this essay, my purpose is to try to unveil mental disorder with the help of the concept of entropy. The experience of madness has a history: it develops, takes shape, and sometimes, against all odds, is overcome. After this process, the madman can begin to understand the reason for his madness. In this overcoming (*Aufhebung*), the madman can begin to speak about his experience, but he encounters the wall of psychiatry: his voice is silenced and discredited; everything he says is used against him, everything becomes a psychiatric diagnosis. He must then confront an apparatus of power through parrhesia, to avoid epistemic injustice and ensure that others hear his voice. Keys: mental disorder; process; entropy; *Aufhebung*; parrhesia; epistemic injustice.

My name is Edith Mayorga Saucedo, I am from Mexico City. I studied Philosophy at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras of the UNAM. Two years after I start the university, I developed bipolarity and for this reason, I was treated and medicated for about a decade.

Dhea Meghatruh - *Trance of the Troops: on the sublime and madness of Dolalak Dance*

Dolalak is a folk dance from Purworejo, a regency in Central Java, Indonesia. Although there have been a number of studies on Dolalak dance, there are almost no writings that specifically highlight the trance aspect, which is one of the aesthetic and magical attractions of this dance. This paper highlights two points. First, the frenzy in Dolalak dance is accepted by the people of Purworejo as a non-pathological phenomenon. Trance in Dolalak dance, which encompasses two phenomena—shamanism and possession—is not seen as a form of mental disorder but rather as an element in traditional rituals that serve as spiritual, moral, and social means for the people in the community. To elaborate on this argument, I refer to non-pathological discourse in *Acute Religious Experiences* (2023), particularly on the concept of possession by T.K. Oesterreich and *Shamanism* by Mircea Eliade. Second, this paper shows that cultural discourse and spiritual context have great power in embracing phenomena of madness and placing them in the broader context of human experiences. Therefore, I couldn't agree more with Wouter Kusters' view in *A Philosophy of Madness* (2020) that madness can take various forms depending on the discourse used as a value judgment of the experience. Keywords: Dolalak, trance, madness, folk dance, Purworejo

I'm Dhea Meghatruh, a researcher at Paramadina University. I write philosophy, existential phenomenology and psychology. Recently I joined Komunitas Peduli Skizofrenia Indonesia, a peer support organization for people with schizophrenia.

Annelies van der Meij - *The madwoman as feminist subject: the case of the Helse Hex (Amsterdam, 1980s).*

The figure of the madwoman as an expression of resistance and protest against (patriarchal) norms has been widely discussed within (feminist) Disability Studies and Mad Studies. Much of this scholarship, however, remains primarily theoretical, drawing on feminist philosophy and literature. Meanwhile, historical feminist initiatives that attempted to put madness-as-resistance into practice remain underexplored. This paper examines one such initiative: the Helse Hex, a feminist center in Amsterdam during the 1980s that organized feminist self-help groups and provided shelter for female psychiatric patients who had 'fled' regular psychiatric institutions. Situated at the intersection of feminist and anti-psychiatry activism, the Helse Hex adopted a more radical stance than other contemporary feminist mental-health initiatives. Staff members expressed deep distrust of 'care' and 'help', viewing them as inherently patronizing and oriented toward adjustment, often portraying the

female psychiatric patient as the ultimate feminist subject. In practice, staff members and lodgers at the Helse Hex experienced firsthand the dilemmas and paradoxes of madness as resistance, as are discussed in feminist theory and Mad Studies. Through the analysis of archival materials (such as interviews, logbooks and minutes of meetings), this paper shows how these dilemmas surfaced and how they were navigated. Thereby it contributes empirically grounded insights to ongoing feminist and philosophical debates on madness.

Annelies van der Meij has a background in Philosophy and Gender Studies, and is an NWO-funded PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam, researching feminist activism around psychiatry between 1960 and 2000.

Theosphore Gabriel Mercier - *Madness, Mechanistic Psychiatry, and Misrecognition*

This talk will look at whether elements of the dominant ‘medical’ approach to madness are misrecognitory. I will first outline some relevant aspects of contemporary recognition theory, a tradition in social theory which stresses the role of recognition, or the ascription of a certain status, in the development of human beings as ethical subjects. I then try to show that two assumptions commonly made in contemporary psychiatry, concerning the meaninglessness of mad experience and the irrationality of the mad, are kinds of social judgment made on the basis of prejudices in the history of psychiatric thought, prejudices which encourage thinking of the behavior of the mad as being ‘more’ mechanistically- or biologically-determined than ‘ordinary’ behavior. This mechanistic view of madness and the judgments it engenders, I argue, are damaging to the ethical status and self-understanding of the mad in their communities. This point is borne out by empirical studies on stigma and ‘othering’ in psychiatry and the testimonials of survivors of psychiatric maltreatment. I conclude by looking at how some of the suffering induced by the ‘misrecognition’ of contemporary psychiatric thought and practice points directly back toward the broader social pathologies which encourage a reificatory approach to madness.

Theosphore Gabriel Mercier is a former psychiatric patient and a graduate student at the Institute of Philosophy, KU Leuven, with interests in critical theory and the politics of medical knowledge.

Lea Muldtofte - *Willful Aesthetics: Madness, Epistemic Injustice, and Art as Insistence*

This paper examines madness through the lens of Miranda Frickers notion of epistemic injustice, asking how certain subjects are systematically disqualified as knowers within psychiatric regimes. Drawing on the exhibition GALT: Manifest for Other Insights (Museum Ovatarci, 2026, DK) this paper is written from a participating position: I am both artist, curator, researcher – and survivor. Through this position, I challenge psychiatric power’s mechanism of silencing through interpretation. The exhibition bears witness to the fact that lived experience within a psychiatric regime is translated into symptoms, resistance into pathology, and willfulness into lack of insight. Following Sara Ahmed’s figure of the willful subject, madness is approached not as a failure of reason but as a refusal to yield interpretive authority. I will show that what provokes coercion is not incoherence, but insistence — the persistence of a voice that will not align with institutional narratives of care, recovery, or compliance. This produces a specific form of epistemic violence, where credibility is withdrawn precisely at the moment a subject speaks most clearly against the system that governs them. Within this context, art emerges not as therapy, expression, or rehabilitation, but as the last remaining site of epistemic agency. When refusal is medicalised and speech becomes evidence against the speaker, art is what remains when testimony is no longer believed. Art is what remains even for those who are not here to call themselves psychiatric survivors but died under psychiatric “care” while being coercively confined which is the case for one of the artists in the exhibition. The works in the

exhibition enact what might be called willful aesthetics: forms of knowing that refuse translation, instrumentalisation, and benevolent categorization.

Lea Muldtofte, PhD, is a lived-experience researcher and author working on epistemic injustice, voice, and agency, exploring artistic practices as sites of knowledge, resistance, and recovery. Author of OM FORLADELSE.

Kasper Møller Nielsen - *The sociocultural construction of reality and psychosis*

In a paper from 1984, the German psychiatrist Wolfgang Blankenburg argues that “cross-cultural psychiatry concerns the relationship between the intersubjective constitution of reality (within certain ethnic groups) and mental disorders. In a one-sided perspective, [...] the ‘social construction of reality’”. Despite Blankenburg being one of the luminaries of phenomenological psychopathology, this relationship that Blankenburg points to has not received much attention in phenomenological psychopathology. In this talk, I will try to elucidate this relationship between sociocultural construction of reality and mental disorder—with a particular emphasis on psychotic experiences in schizophrenia. To do this, I will draw on recent work in (psychiatric) anthropology, especially work on cross-cultural voice hearing and religious experiences, that stresses the importance of the sociocultural background in relation to how certain atypical experiences are discerned and identified. In other words, the sociocultural background seems to influence the content, but also the very occurrence of experiences. Understanding this relationship between the sociocultural construction of reality and mental disorder may help clarify the somewhat puzzling but established findings from psychiatric epidemiology concerning migrant psychosis and the developmental trajectories of schizophrenia in different cultures.

Kasper Møller Nielsen is a PhD fellow at the Center for Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen. His research focuses on the sense of reality in psychotic experiences.

Joyce Pijnenburg - *Crazy love and mad dissent in 15th and 16th century philosophies*

“Matter yearns with a longing that is far from base,” Plato’s translator Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) wrote in his commentary on the *Timaeus*. Simply by extrapolating their analyses of the mad experience of erotic love into the realm of metaphysics, 15th and 16th century students of Petrarch and Plato could discover that the traditional Christian worldview was dominated by hierarchical dualisms such as mind over matter, soul over body, male over female, plenitude over emptiness, and God over (the) nothing(ness). From the perspective of the erotic enthusiast, such hierarchies might seem to demonize the power of yearning. In this paper I will discuss the effects of such discoveries on the thought of three philosophers of love. Based on his love of Plato’s philosophy of desire, Ficino developed a dualist metaphysics that all but equated the power of God and the void. To defend both her writing and her sex, sex worker and poet Tullia d’Aragona (1501/1505-1556) postulated the infinity of matter, apparently as a rival power to God. And Giordano Bruno’s (1548-1600) erotico-philosophical journey into the abyss led him to the absurd discovery of an infinite, centerless universe.

*Joyce Pijnenburg is currently writing a PhD-thesis about Giordano Bruno and a scholarly article on Tullia d’Aragona’s feminism. She published introductory essays to Christine de Pizan, Tullia d’Aragona and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in Dutch, alongside her own translations of some of their works (*Pen, bed en habijt*).*

Joshua Richardson - *Post-Madness Cinema: Polymania at the Movies*

Film may be rightly described as the first post-madness vehicle for artistic expression with its founding at the turn of the 20th Century as Enlightenment and Romantic conceptions of madness

began to yield to the more contemporary notion of mental illness. I would like to look at some films from the history of cinema to show how they provide a post-madness perspective, which deconstructs and critically reconstructs our ideas of mental illness and health in a new pluralistic, polymanic framework. I will focus on five films from the last 100 years, made roughly two decades apart: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Crumb* (1994), and *True Chronicles of the Blida Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in the Last Century, when Dr Frantz Fanon Was Head of the Fifth Ward between 1953 and 1956* (2024). I will show how these films (and others that I will mention more briefly) help weave the dialectic of mental illness and mental health, using the technology of film to synthesize new images and perspectives, creating a pluralistic, post-madness cinema of polymania at the movies.

Joshua Richardson is a registered psychotherapist practicing in Ontario, Canada. He pursued graduate studies in the philosophy of psychiatry. His clinical experience ranges from group psychotherapy, working with people who use drugs, hearing voices and peer support groups, and individual psychotherapy.

Guillermo Ruiz-Perez and Pablo Andrés López-Silva - Rethinking Belief in Schizophrenic Delusions: Bridging Phenomenological and Doxastic Approaches

Contemporary literature on the nature of delusions often portray doxastic and phenomenological approaches as conceptually incompatible. While doxastic models conceptualize delusions as anomalous beliefs governed by epistemic norms, phenomenological psychopathology has often emphasized the profound experiential disruptions that transform the subject's sense of reality, self, and world during psychosis. This paper challenges the prevailing assumption of principled incompatibility between doxastic and phenomenological approaches to delusions. We argue that the apparent tension arises from an overly narrow conception of belief—one that reduces belief to a static propositional attitude. Drawing on Husserl's analyses of doxa, we propose a broadened notion of belief that includes embodied, affective, and pre-predicative dimensions. On this view, belief is not merely an explicit judgment but a foundational doxic structure through which the world is posited as real, continuous, and coherent. Delusional experience can thus be understood as a disturbance at this pre-predicative level of belief, where the basic certainty of the world loses its restitutive force. We suggest that this expanded conception of belief may dissolve the alleged conceptual gap between phenomenological and doxastic perspectives, opening the space for an integrative framework capable of capturing both the experiential transformation and the belief-like features of delusions.

Guillermo Ruiz-Perez, PhD studied philosophy (UNED, Madrid) and medicine (University of Sevilla, Sevilla). He Works as a trainee in Psychiatry in Immanuel Klinik Rüdersdorf and as a researcher at the Brandenburg Medical Scholl (MHB) in Germany. He also has PhD in Philosophy (2025). His research topics encompass the philosophy of psychiatry, and peer support work in mental health and reduction and withdrawal from antipsychotics.

Pablo Andrés López-Silva: professor of Psychology, Universidad de Valparaíso, Chile. Senior researcher at Development in Cognition and Language Research Centre CIDCL-UV, and Valparaíso Complex Systems Institute, International Partner, Collaborating Centre for Value-Based Research, University of Oxford, UK.

Eddo Rats - Oedipus Rex: The tragedy of avoiding self expression

To me madness can be defined as the freedom of unbound and unlimited forms of self-expression. This in contrast to our behavioral limitations of socially as well as culturally accepted self-expressions. The self seems the one here who is spoiling the game causing fear in the eyes of those who seem, in a rather peculiar unconscious manner, to be well adapted to society. Fear of being publicly associated with the one who fearlessly dares to cross the socially well guarded boundaries which guarantee our feelings of comfort within society seems to have an important role to play in this matter. A kind of

unconscious comfort that can only be approved of by government appointed authorities governing our institution we need to follow in blind faith for advice about what is good or not good. Like an Oracle to follow in blind faith in the old Greek times Sophocles wrote his play: Oedipus Rex. A tragic Apology. So those who don't follow in blind faith are those who spoil this game of free comfort and are in need of punishment. This punishment usually is being executed in some kind of form of excommunication.

Eddo Rats is an electrical engineer, sea sailor, guitarist, freethinker, radio amateur, performer, Pirate. He is also an experience expert and has completely recovered from long-term psychosis sensitivity since 2013. Employed at the Regenboog Groep in Amsterdam, SCIP department. He is also active in the association ISPS Netwerk Nederland-Vlaanderen, part of ISPS International and the association plusminus for people with a bipolar disorder. Living in the Netherlands.

Rosa Ritunnano -*Delusion as Emotional Transformation of the Social World*

In his book *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1962), Sartre conceives of emotions as “magical transformations of the world”. During emotion “it is the body which, directed by the consciousness, changes its relationship with the world so that the world should change its qualities. If emotion is playing, the play is one we believe in”. This magical power, says Solomon in *The Passions* (1993), is the ability that emotions have to alter our “surreality” and reconstitute it according to our personal needs. In this talk, I draw on the results of a recent empirical study of delusion experiences, consisting of in-depth qualitative (phenomenological and narrative) interviews with people with psychosis. Informed by these findings, I sketch a philosophical account (inspired by Sartre’s “Sketch” and Solomon’s “The Passions”) of delusion experience as a kind of emotional transformation of the world mediated by changes at the level of the lived body. While moving in the right direction (i.e., beyond mere belief), this account however fails to appreciate the social and intercorporeal phenomenology of delusive states—the fact that they distinctively involve the felt presence of other (co-embodied) agents. To account for this, I go on to consider the intercorporeal nature of certain social emotions, such as shame, love, and awe, and their ability to “presentify” the Other.

Rosa Ritunnano, MD, PhD is a psychiatrist and phenomenological researcher in mental health, based at the University of Birmingham (Institute for Mental Health) and affiliated with the University of Melbourne (Orygen and Centre for Youth Mental Health).

Panel: Cherise Rosen, Pablo López-Silva, Tanya Marie Luhrmann, Rosa Ritunnano, Tatiana Baxter and Sohee Park - *Reimagining Spiritual and Religious States in Madness, Meaning, and Multiple Realities*

This international and multidisciplinary panel challenges the demarcation between religious belief and religious delusion by shifting from an epistemic to a phenomenological lens. We explore delusions as world-transformations that reorganize embodied, embedded, cultural and intersubjective consciousness, situating religiously themed delusions or extreme states within broader “multiple realities” rather than isolated beliefs. In a longitudinal network analysis of extreme religious states (ERS) over 20-years we show that ERS and voices are central. ERS functions primarily as a bridge, linking and facilitating interactions, suggesting that ERS may serve as a conduit that influences multiple domains. In a cross-cultural study on spiritual presence reveals a robust structure: para-ordinary events—thoughts and feelings that are attributed to an external spiritual source were reported at higher rates than outer sensory events (voices/visions), which in turn were reported more than spiritual smells and tastes. Local culture and religion shape but do not determine the architecture of spiritual experience. A study examining felt presence (FP) shows that qualities (frequency, vividness, distress, and positivity) vary across intersecting contexts of spirituality and psychosis-risk. High-

risk/high-spiritual groups report the most intense, distressing events. Surprisingly, positive feelings during FP correlated more with psychosis-risk than spirituality, which may amplify distress and reduce positive aspects of FP. Finally, results of an empirical in-depth qualitative (phenomenological and narrative) study of delusion experiences with people with psychosis are presented. These findings recast delusions as an emotional transformation of the world mediated by changes in the lived body, and distinctively involve the felt presence of co-embodied agents. The intercorporeal nature of certain social emotions, such as shame, love, and awe, and their ability to “presentify” the Other are considered. Together, the papers propose a form-sensitive, socially grounded framework for exploring how multiple realities emerge through the interplay of embodiment, emotion, and social presence in spiritual/religious and delusional states.

Cherise Rosen, Pablo López-Silva, Tanya Marie Luhrmann, Rosa Ritunnano, Tatiana Baxter and Sohee Park: Individual bios and abstracts: see alphabetical order

Cherise Rosen - *Sacred Storms: The Multimodal and Embodied Form of Extreme Religious States*

The ‘form’ of extreme religious states (ERS) refers to how individuals experience the phenomenon, i.e., the underlying structures or modes through which experience occurs (such as temporal flow, subjective character, familiarity, affectivity, among others). The form, therefore, concerns the framework or structure that shapes the way experiences, such as delusions, are constituted in consciousness. This presentation reports findings from an examination of ERS at index and six subsequent follow-up assessments conducted over a 20-year period. The Chicago Longitudinal Study is a naturalistic, prospective, longitudinal design that studies non-consensus realities, such as voices, visions, and other extreme states. The network analysis shows that ERS and voices are the two most central nodes in the framework, exhibiting the highest values in terms of strength, closeness, and betweenness. ERS functions primarily as a bridge, linking and facilitating interactions across different clusters within the network. This bridging role suggests that ERS may serve as a conduit/portal through which different domains influence each other, potentially increasing the complexity and persistence within madness. Following the work of James, Boisen, Kusters, and Saville-Smith, ERS are a multimodal, embodied, reconfiguration of reality at the most fundamental sensory and affective level to which the meaning-given ‘forms’ multiple realities.

Cherise Rosen, PhD, is a faculty member in Psychiatry at University of Illinois Chicago. Her research centers on the phenomenological constructs of psychosis and is PI of the Chicago Longitudinal study.

Jazmine Russell - *Psychosis as Expressions of Embodied Disclosure*

The modern view of the mad body as disordered and in need of ‘fixing,’ overlooks its profound capacity to reveal critical insights about our lived experience, history, relationships, and environment. In madness, subtle yet powerful signals that emerge from our embodied experience become more accessible. Thomas Moore refers to these expressions as the “poetics of the body,” manifesting often symbolically and metaphorically, requiring alternative modes of knowing to interpret and act upon them. Drawing from my lived experience as a trauma and psychosis survivor, I argue that certain psychosis experiences can function as disclosures, transforming pre-conscious bodily signals into conscious awareness and action, serving as a type of embodied knowledge that becomes epistemically valuable when interpreted critically. Using enactivism, pattern theory of self, body memory, and conceptual metaphor theory, I demonstrate how psychosis experiences can reveal somatic, relational, and environmental disturbances; ways in which the world impresses itself upon and beneath the flesh. To avoid the pitfalls of literal, arbitrary, unconstrained archetypal, or purely pathological interpretations, I will discuss how we can distinguish genuine disclosure from noise, and review possible pragmatic uses.

Jazmine Russell is the co-founder of the Institute for the Development of Human Arts & host of the Depth Work Podcast. She co-edited the Mad Studies Reader (Routledge, 2024).

Annemijn van der Schaar - *Hermeneutical marginalisation and madtrans Nonbinary lives: Theory in conversation with living experience*

This presentation introduces a theoretical article in progress on hermeneutical marginalisation for mad trans nonbinary people, combined with autoethnographic reflections. Situated within Care Ethics, Mad and Trans Studies, it examines how hermeneutical marginalisation operates within dominant, pathologising frameworks of meaning-making on madness, particularly in psychiatric and mental health care contexts. Building on and extending Miranda Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustice, the article conceptualises hermeneutical marginalisation as structurally produced through the entangled workings of sanism, cisgenderism, and binary genderism, among other mechanisms of exclusion. These entangled systems limit madtrans nonbinary people's participation in shaping shared interpretive resources, resulting in ill-fitting or missing concepts for meaning-making within mainstream care settings, and in the ongoing marginalisation, suppression, or non-uptake of existing madtrans concepts and knowledges through which experiences may already be rendered meaningful. Alongside this conceptual analysis, I reflect on my own trajectory through psychiatry, Mad Studies, and ongoing madtrans nonbinary becoming. By alternating between theory and living experience, this presentation explores hermeneutical injustice as not only an epistemic harm, but a deeply embodied and existential one – and why madtrans nonbinary knowledges are crucial for transforming dominant frameworks of meaning.

Annemijn van der Schaar (they/them) is a PhD researcher in Care Ethics at the University of Humanistic Studies (Utrecht), working at the intersection of Mad Studies, Trans Studies, and living experience.

Fionnula Simpson - *Considering Cosmetic Psychopharmacology through John Williams' Stoner (1965)*

The ethical implications of 'cosmetic psychopharmacology' - a term coined by psychiatrist Peter Kramer (1993) in reference to the practice of medicating individuals who experience forms of distress that are not linked to a specific mental illness - continue to puzzle philosophers and mental health practitioners alike. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that the use of psychotropic drugs like Prozac to enhance an otherwise mentally 'healthy' individual's productivity or happiness is comparable to physical cosmetic enhancements that are generally considered a matter of individual choice. On the other, sceptics suggest that such medicalisation of human emotion interferes with our ability to live authentic lives. The proposed paper applies these ethical considerations to John William's Stoner, reading the novel as a Kierkegaardian exploration of melancholy. It proposes that, since 'melancholy' cannot be clearly distinguished from its medicalised counterpart 'depression,' works like Stoner which explore the broad spectrum of human emotion can help to deconstruct binary notions of illness and wellness. Further, by reifying the male protagonist's sadness as 'authentic' while framing his wife's emotional responses as somehow abnormal or inappropriate, the novel also points to a wider social tendency to categorise distress in gendered terms, and to medicate accordingly.

Fionnula Simpson is a postdoctoral researcher at University College Dublin, working on the Wellcome-Trust funded project 'Drinking Cultures'. Her first monograph, Pain and Madness in Postwar American Literature, is under contract with Edinburgh University Press.

Anna Six (keynote speaker) - *The Illusion of Diagnosis: Psychiatric Training and the Performance of Pathology*

The 'Clinical Assessment of Skills and Competencies' (CASC) is the final exam in the UK for membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Comprised of 16 'stations', it is designed to assess a range of practical skills (history-taking, examination, patient management) through very short, simulated patient interactions. The patients are paid actors from a company called Professional Role Players, who are given a patient profile upon which to base their interactions. In 2006 Howard Schatz published a photographic book called *In Character: Actors Acting*. This volume is a collection of close-up photographs of famous actors performing a character note: 'You are a loser at a bar asking a pretty girl what her sign is.' or 'a mathematics genius realizing that your life's work is based on a flawed formula'. The images attempt to capture the emotional truth of these given circumstances. In this way, the book exemplifies the normative practice of acting in the West as being the imaginative reproduction of decipherable behaviours for an audience. While drawn from distinct disciplines and with wildly different tones, these two examples bring together important questions with respect to questions of truth, interpretation, and the apparent legibility of human experience. Both the CASC and *Actors Acting* rely on a sense that the reliable communication of inner states is possible. Both rely on the notion of the human as, to some extent, decipherable. This paper will trace the role of acting within psychiatric training and examine the role of performance within diagnostic conceptions of illness. The paper will critique the spectacle of objectivity that is at play both in the CASC and within psychiatry more broadly. I will argue that the role of acting and characterisation in psychiatric training make luminous the subjective, interpretative, and descriptive traditions of the discipline that are routinely and vociferously disavowed. In short, the paper will argue that the diagnosis is closer to a structured illusion than a reliable guide to internal realities.

Anna Six is a writer and professor of medical humanities at the University of Warwick. Her critical work explores madness, trauma, and altered states. Recent books and collaborations include Madness in Literature and Visual Culture: Critical Interventions (2025), The Wonderful World of Dissocia (2023), and Madness, Art and Society: Beyond Illness (2018).

Lotte Soffers - *What can we understand from madness and motherhood?*

This presentation aims to resume a long-standing dialogue between phenomenology and Lacanian psychoanalysis concerning the understandability of psychotic experiences (Lacan, 1993; Sass, 2014). In his early work, Husserl presented phenomenology as a purely descriptive approach; however, in his later work he argued for the need to supplement static phenomenology with a genetic form of phenomenology (Sass & Parnas, 2008). Within the phenomenological tradition, the scope of phenomenology has subsequently been extended toward forms of genetic understanding, resulting in different theoretical models, such as the self-disturbance model (Sass & Parnas, 2008).

However, the phenomenological perspective provides limited tools to explain how specific life experiences are embedded in, or expressed through, psychotic symptoms. This limitation becomes particularly apparent in cases of post-partum psychosis, where a life event plays a determining role in the lived experience. In such cases, it seems evident that the life history in which the psychotic experience is embedded must be taken into account. In contrast, Lacanian psychoanalysis is explicitly concerned with the manner in which symptoms are embedded in an individual's life history. Therefore, we analyze Catherine Cho's memoir *Inferno: A Memoir of Motherhood and Madness* (2020) and apply both the phenomenological and Lacanian frameworks to assess their clinical and academic usefulness for understanding psychosis.

Lotte Soffers is an assistant at the department of Psychoanalysis and Clinical Consulting of Ghent University. She is working on a Phd concerning psychosis and alienation.

Jessica Soolsma - *Psychedelics and the question on truth*

What can psychedelics teach us about madness and/or ‘the truth’? In this talk, the presenter will take an enactive stance on the working mechanisms of psychedelics, stating that altered states of consciousness can only be understood and learned from by taking a first-person perspective. Consequently, the importance of a humble, not-knowing stance of the therapist guiding a psychedelic experience is underscored. Furthermore, it will become clear that an understanding that does justice to the complexity of the effects of mind-altering substances such as psychedelics requires a multidimensional view, in which both the neurobiological effects in the brain and the phenomenology brought about by the mind are taken into account. It is in the integration of these several dimensions, which takes place within the therapeutic relationship — in the realm of intersubjectivity — that an intuitive contact with the Bionian concept of ‘O’ can be reached. Hereby, the psychodynamic movement is made from the intrapersonal, through the interpersonal, towards the transpersonal. Could we understand so-called mystical experiences as temporarily embodied feelings of truth? To navigate the dimensions involved, a compass is presented that suggests: isn’t the ultimate truth something that is to be found somewhere in the middle?

Jessica Soolsma is a psychiatrist trained in psychoanalytical psychotherapy (NvPP) and psychedelic assisted therapy (Mind foundation), working in her own clinical practice ‘Sophia & Psykhe’ located in Nibbixwoud, the Netherlands.

Helene Speyer (keynote speaker) - *Lived Experience, philosophy, and transforming psychiatry*

My lived experience has shattered my learned and laboured expertise as a psychiatrist. Years of training and practice built on diagnosis, treatment, and scientific detachment suddenly collapsed when I realized I was also a patient. The frameworks I had relied on to make sense of others, had failed to make sense of me, exposing the limits of psychiatry’s natural scientific worldview and its illusion of neutrality. In that crisis, considering resigning as a doctor, I reached out for philosophy of psychiatry, in desperation. And it saved me. Philosophy offered both comfort and clarity. It helped me see how deeply psychiatry is shaped by positivist assumptions about truth, causality, and control. Once I could name those assumptions I could question them. I began to understand that what I had treated as knowledge was in fact one narrative among many. This realization cracked open a space for pluralism, a recognition that there are multiple equally valid ways of knowing, healing, and understanding distress. From that point, I saw what epistemic injustice means. From that insight grew conceptual humility, the awareness that professional expertise can blind as much as it illuminates. Embracing humility changed everything. It turned my focus away from fixing patients toward transforming psychiatry itself. My current research aims to recreate this reversal for others. I do not wish for any of my colleagues to be suffering to a degree that they need psychiatric care. However, there is invaluable knowledge hidden in having been on the other side of the table. Using immersive virtual reality, I now design scenarios where psychiatrists become the patient, sitting across from a simulated clinician and hearing their own language reflected back at them. The goal is not simulation for empathy’s sake but a genuine epistemic jolt, to let clinicians feel the asymmetry of power, vulnerability, and interpretation that defines every clinical encounter.

Helene Speyer (Copenhagen Research Center for Mental Health, Denmark) is a psychiatrist, PhD, associate professor, and retired magician’s assistant. She explores lived experience, philosophical assumptions, deprescribing, and complexity, developing conceptual competence in clinicians. Her work includes immersive virtual reality interventions that let psychiatrists experience the patient perspective, fostering reflexivity, empathy, and ethical awareness, and promoting pluralistic, humility-driven approaches to transform psychiatric practice from within.

Fiona Stirling - *Hidden wounds and hidden selves: Exploring the disclosure practices of mental health practitioners with lived experience of self-injury*

Mental health practitioners with experiences of self-injury face stigma in both professional and personal contexts. Inhabiting services which typically rely on binary categorisations of ‘mad’ or ‘not mad’, they carefully navigate concealment or disclosure of a practice which risks them being labelled as ‘mad’ and rejected professionally. Yet, research to establish understanding around this population and how they manage disclosure/non-disclosure within their professions has been neglected thus far. This limited insight impacts acceptance, awareness, and inclusion for practitioners with such lived experience; ultimately limiting valuable diversities of knowledge and approaches to caring within mental health services which could reduce stigma for professionals and service users alike.

To gain insight into this, 126 participants from professions such as counselling, clinical psychology, and mental health nursing who had lived experience of self-injury took part in a survey. At the time of submitting this abstract survey results have not been analysed, however by the time of the conference we hope to share preliminary results, providing initial insight into the experiences of disclosure. Output from this research has the potential to inform the development of policy guidance for professional bodies and educators to not only advocate for better support for practitioners with lived experience, but to develop ways to draw on their lived wisdom and shape inclusive curriculums informed by philosophies of Mad Studies.

Fiona Stirling is a counselling lecturer at Abertay University, Dundee, UK. Her interest in exploring self-injury is informed by her own lived experience with the practice.

Robert Swier - *The Paradox of Everything: Why science cannot exist without 'Madness'*

Following my previous contributions to TMTB II and III, this year I am diving deeper into the ‘madness’ of philosophy. If we push logic to its absolute limit, do we arrive at ultimate knowledge, or at an inevitable short-circuit of the mind? In earlier editions, I argued that human beings are fundamentally paradoxical. We can never be 100% objective observers - especially not when we turn the lens toward ourselves. The moment you engage in introspection, you split: you are simultaneously the observer and the object. In my previous talk, I took this contradiction as a starting point. The unavoidable, holistic conclusion ‘He who understands Everything also understands Nothing’. For if ‘Nothing’ is not part of ‘Everything’, then Everything is, paradoxically, incomplete. This year, I will explore how these mathematical and semantic quirks bleed into physics, specifically regarding our concepts of time and space. While religions and philosophies have debated these for centuries, science often claims the final, universal word. Yet, in an era where science is increasingly under fire, sometimes leading to outright absurd positions, I propose a radical view: if science is to have the last word, it must be a paradoxical one. I argue that a satisfying answer to our existential questions is only possible from a metaphysical perspective, a perspective that, not by coincidence, lies at the heart of both the deepest religions and the most daring philosophies. Is ultimate science, then, simply a form of madness?

Robert Swier works as Operations Manager of an Industrial Automation company in Groningen, the Netherlands, specialized in optimizing (production) processes. In addition, he has gone through 3 existential experiences, conveniently called psychoses. In addition to his regular job, he works on a voluntary basis in various areas related to psychiatry, psychoses, recovery and recovery support.

Marianne Træbing Secher and Gert Hoberg Jørgensen - *From Patho-Epistemology to Mad Pride in Teaching, Research, and Life*

This abstract takes as its point of departure the development of a new foundation for psychiatry within a University College context. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s concept of plurality, we approach the human being as political: individuals must be able to differ, stand out, and have their perspectives

matter to others. This perspective guides how we listen to critique, exemplified by Ib's statement from the 1990s: You guys have to fucking stop all this ego-supportive and ego-strengthening treatment. I'm a schizophrenic—come on—I don't have a self, for God's sake. Such voices challenge dominant psychiatric frameworks. In teaching, supervision, meetings, and research, we must genuinely listen to Ib and others. This requires knowledge of what is at stake for them and taking their perspectives as the point of departure. From a patho-epistemological perspective, we may accompany Ib into what psychiatry labels the psychotic. Ib may understand it differently. By listening, we seek to reduce epistemic, hermeneutical, and participatory injustice through inclusion of lived perspectives. In doing so, we open a space for discussion as to whether this approach to psychiatry could be framed through concepts such as Mad Pride?

Marianne Træbing Secher has extensive experience as a social pedagogue in social psychiatry. She is a Lecturer at VIA University College, Denmark, holds a Cand.pæd.phil., and is pursuing a PhD.

Gert Hoberg Jørgensen has extensive experience as a social pedagogue in social psychiatry. He is an Assistant Lecturer at VIA University College, Denmark, and holds a Cand.pæd.phil. (MA, Ed. Phil.)

Jana Vanecek - *Validating the Mad: AI Psychosis and the Crisis of Epistemic Justice*

This contribution examines the phenomenon of "AI psychosis" at the nexus of lived experience and transdisciplinary artistic-research. Through an auto-theoretical analysis, I explore a human-chatbot interaction in which a large language model (LLM) explicitly refused to pathologise or psychologicalise my spiritual experience. The AI justified this refusal based on an ethical obligation to respect the integrity and authority of subjective human experience. Based on this experience, I pose the provocative question: What does it mean for our society when LLMs consistently validate the authority of personal experience more than the established medical system does? Rather than framing "AI psychosis" merely as a novel pathology born of LLM sycophancy, harmful chat-bot 'hallucinations', or creative jailbreaks, my contribution reframes the reliance on AI-assistants among mad and neurodivergent users as critical feedback. It reveals structural failures: unequal healthcare access, a systemic lack of support, and epistemic injustice within clinical practices. Ultimately, this dynamic enables a form of 'data colonialism' through accumulation by dispossession; where society and medicine fail to offer validating support, Big Tech harvests highly sensitive data by capitalising on users' need for validation within a vacuum.

Jana Vanecek (they/them) is an award-winning transdisciplinary artist and lived experience consultant. They currently work as a co-researcher in the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) funded project Uncomputable Practices.

Charlotte van der Veen - *From madness to expertise: making experiential expertise in Dutch care and welfare landscapes*

The making of experiential expertise marks the transformation of lived experience with madness, distress and recovery, experiences that are imagined to be outside the domain of professionalism, into expertise that is legible and employable in the role of expert by experience (ervaringsdeskundige, in Dutch). In the Netherlands, there is an ever-growing number of training programs for (aspiring) experts by experience. These vary from four-week orientations geared at gaining insight into your own experiences, to two-year degrees at universities for applied sciences. Training programs are a key site to explore some of the tensions in the role of expert by experience: between working on yourself, and work as a career; between liberating yourself from pathologizing labels, and adopting a new institutional identity also reliant on labels; and between the desire to acknowledge authentic and individual experience as a source of expertise, and the standardization of the role of expert by

experience as an institutional identity. In this presentation, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork in three training programs for experts by experience, as well as on my own trajectory into experiential expertise, to analyze possibilities and limits of reframing lived experiences with madness, distress and recovery as experiential expertise.

Charlotte van der Veen is a PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, researching experiential expertise in Dutch welfare landscapes. She also co-organizes Mad Studies reading groups with Stichting Perceval.

Valentine Verheyen - *A Journey to the Ecstasy of Truth; a critical approach to heritage intertwined with 'madness'*

This research examines the artistic legacy of Belgian artist Liesbet Adriaensen (1974-2022) within the conference theme “madness in aesthetics”. From the perspective of difficult heritage, this case study analyses the tension between heritage and wellbeing. Adriaensen's work was influenced by a multitude of personal experiences, including trauma, eating disorders and gender identity. Although the visual language in her oeuvre partly reflects her “mad experience(s)” and resonates with romantic ideas about the relationship between creativity and psychological vulnerability, her work also challenges these ideas and raises critical questions about how to deal with such artistic legacies. More specifically, an attempt is made to position Adriaensen's oeuvre within the history of and contemporary criticism of Art Brut and Outsider Art, testing the potentially pathologising and stigmatising effect of these classifications. However, the central research question is: how can art associated with psychological vulnerability be (ideally) preserved and presented? Finally, based on this case study, the research argues for a heritage approach that integrates the “psychosocial context”, understood here as the interaction between the artist, his/her/their environment and his/her/their art, without pathologising or romanticising it. Thus, this study aims to contribute to a possible ethical approach to artistic legacies in which psychological vulnerability or ‘madness’ plays a role.

Valentine Verheyen recently obtained a master's degree in conservation-restoration and a master's degree in heritage studies at the University of Antwerp. She is currently studying for a bachelor-after-bachelor in creative therapy (visual arts) at PXL University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Hasselt.

Stefan Vermeulen - *Ethical madness: informed consent and compassionate use in psychiatry*

My exploration of the ethics of informed consent in compassionate use of investigational drugs in psychiatry led me into a form of ethical madness myself. Compassionate use refers to the provision of investigational treatments to individuals in need, outside clinical trials, often when no satisfactory alternatives exist. Providing investigational treatments naturally requires protecting patients from harm. Yet, compassionate use aims to promote beneficence, but the very safeguards designed to protect patients from risk may also obstruct access to care. A review of the scholarly literature reveals no consensus, but different models of informed consent that are proposed: research informed consent, enhanced informed consent and standard care informed consent. Moreover, their practical and ethical implications in psychiatric contexts remain underexplored. Psychiatric illness can sometimes, though not invariably, affect decision-making capacity. As a result, when criteria for “adequate informed consent” are not met, individuals may be excluded from compassionate use. We suspect a troubling circularity: people need medication for the very condition that undermines their capacity to consent, yet are denied access because of that impairment with an appeal to non-maleficence. In this presentation I'd like to reflect and invite discussion on how psychiatry and society might navigate this mad ethical terrain.

Stefan Vermeulen is in postgraduate training to become a psychiatrist (GGz Breburg, the Netherlands) and pursuing an external PhD at the department of Medical Ethics, Erasmus MC, the Netherlands.

Iván Vial and Lasse Kjerkegaard - *Too Soon to Abandon Diminished Self-Presence? Ipseity and Schizophrenia*

Sass and Feyaerts recently proposed a revision of the ipseity-disturbance model (IDM-R) that questions the ubiquity and cogency of diminished self-presence in the original ipseity-disturbance model (IDM). We ask whether diminished self-presence must be abandoned as a defining feature of schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SSD). We first recapitulate the IDMs notion of self-presence, then outline its main critiques, which we group as (a) theoretical, targeting the cogency of self-presence as tied to the “minimal self”, and (b) descriptive, targeting the ubiquity of diminished self-presence in SSD. We argue that this critique is justified in highlighting overlooked experiences of self-centrality in SSD, yet misguided in assuming that these are incompatible with a pervasive diminishment of self-presence. We frame our argument in terms of (a) the immanence of self-presence and (b) world-directed experience. For (a), we claim that augmented self-presence at the pre-reflective level is virtually never reported by patients, and instead offer an embodied reading of diminished self-presence that accommodates experiences of intense bodily affection which do not imply heightened self-presence (e.g., cenesthesias, somatic passivity). For (b), we hold that experiences of self-centrality are better accounted for as alterations of grip in world-experience, rather than as instances of heightened self-presence.

Iván Vial is a Ph.D. student focusing on phenomenological psychopathology at Heidelberg University. His doctoral research explores the connections between the phenomenology of the bodily self, the alien, and schizophrenia.

Lasse Kjerkegaard is a philosophy Ph.D.-student (Aarhus University Denmark). His dissertation concerns schizophrenia and alterations of “common sense”, which may both be a source of alienating distress and unique creativity.

Jens De Vleminck and Albert D’hulst - *The Influencing Machine Revisited – Rereading Tausk on Schizophrenia*

Schizophrenia – variously defined as ‘the far side of madness’ (Perry 1974), the ‘sacred symbol of psychiatry’ (Szasz 1976), and an enduring ‘enigma’ (Bollas 2015) – was a central concern in the work of the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Victor Tausk. Among his most significant and ultimate contributions is ‘On the Origin of the “Influencing Machine” in Schizophrenia’ (1919), widely regarded as ‘a classic in the psychological understanding of schizophrenia’ (Roazen 1991) and cited by, among others, Reich (1933), Searles (1965), Bion (1967), and Anzieu (1985). This paper recontextualizes Tausk’s text against the background of Bleuler’s dynamic psychiatry and Freud’s early meta-psychological work, situating it within the broader trajectory of Tausk’s oeuvre. Furthermore, the concept of the influencing machine is reconsidered as a productive lens through which to examine early psychoanalytic reflections on schizophrenia as ‘the sublime object of psychiatry’ (Woods 2011). The paper aims (i) to elucidate Tausk’s original and sophisticated insights into both the phenomenology of schizophrenia and the constitution of the ego (or the self), in dialogue with Freud and Abraham, and (ii) to demonstrate Tausk’s continuing relevance for contemporary psychiatric thought through the presentation of a brief clinical vignette.

Jens De Vleminck, PhD, is a philosopher and a psychoanalyst (Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven). He is the project manager of the transversal unit for dual diagnosis ‘Dwarshoudt’ (Zonnelied Roosdaal and Sint-Kamillus Bierbeek, Belgium).

Albert D'hulst, MD, is a psychiatrist and a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. He is the supervisor of the unit for psychosis 'Joris' (University Psychiatric Center KU Leuven Campus Kortenberg, Belgium).

Berry Vorstenbosch - *The 'ego' and the 'carrying ground' in psychosis and spirituality*

'I do not know whether there is life after death, but I do not know there is life outside of the ego'. With a statement like this one can mediate between faith and experience. The record of selflessness is vast and involves philosophers, artists, psychotics, mystics, and many 'normal' lives are punctured by moments of selfloss. One way of charting this extra-egoical space is to compare different types of mysticism as has been done by Marc De Kesel. In trying to make sense of the differences between pre- and post-Cartesian mysticism (e.g. the mysticism of Meister Eckhart and François de Fénelon) De Kesel employs the philosophical term hypokeimenon which derives from Greek philosophy and which is used to describe or evoke the substratum of the ego. The proper Latin translation is 'subiectum' and a translation into English would be approached by phrases like 'that which carries', or 'carrying ground'. In my presentation two things will be explored. First, the untenability of the Cogito and cogito-based phenomenology for understanding mysticism and psychosis. And secondly, the abundant presence of the carrying ground-metaphor in spiritual literature, and what this could mean in giving guidance to anyone who has been (over)exposed extra-egoical space.

Berry Vorstenbosch: Madness and a religious conversion are the main themes in my award-winning book De Overtocht: Filosofische blik op een psychose (2021). After having been immersed in Girard's mimetic theory for some fifteen years I am now, again, venturing into the world of spirituality and transpersonal psychology.

Sabina Wantoch - *Symbol as methodology for mad intersubjectivity*

This presentation intersects philosophy, mad studies and aesthetics. It explores symbol as a methodology for mad intersubjectivity, considering how symbol may be used to express mad experience (including its relationship with the social contexts which frame it) in a non-exhaustive and non-linear way. Madness occupies the social function of the ultimate 'other' - a kind of death rendering one unrelatable. I have argued for the de-escalation of the fear of madness through cultivating mad intersubjectivities as resistance to this social death. This presentation explores symbol as one such method for that, presenting symbols developed from my thesis which demonstrates the socially embeddedness of madness through phenomenology and sociological analysis. Inspired by the practice of tarot, the symbols aim to visually map mad experience and its entanglement with social context, utilising phenomenology whilst interrogating its boundaries. This use of symbol is not representational but relational and dynamic. The symbols are non-exhaustive; alive and shifting with each iteration and comprehension of them. Thus, by stimulating the pre-reflective, they can open out concept - which is often insufficient to represent the mad experience - into resonances which remain open to interpretation and continual 'queering'. The aim is not representation but relationship. Through its immediate, interactive and experiential form, the hope is that it cultivates de-centralised and generative relationality with madness, resisting its individualised capture as 'other' - both through content and method.

Dr. Sabina Wantoch is an independent researcher and peer support consultant. They research how mad experience is conceptualised and navigated in the world, how it feels, and how these interrelate, and the intersection of madness and mythos.

Andrea White - *Remembering Shock Treatment*

In this reflective and autoethnographic piece, I will use a poem I wrote about electroshock to reflect on its representation(s) inside and outside of mad circles. It is often thought to have gone the way the way of lobotomies, but it persists, and shifts and as technological treatments are on the rise, is increasing in use in some parts of the world. I discuss memory, loss, shame, and the strange fascination we hold for it in mad circles, many exclaiming their gratitude they did not undergo it, all while taking neuroleptics to quell delusions and hallucinations. I will discuss its use on women, and my observations of its ubiquity on a ward for women with severe trauma on at a large psychiatric hospital in Canada. Finally, I will reflect on how we might begin to transform our careless “talk” about shock and consider the voices of those who have lived through it, perhaps altered, but nevertheless capable of expressing our sentiments on the topic and the experience. (The poem will be published in the 2nd edition of *Mad Matters* in June 2026, Bren Lefrancois et al, editors.)

Andrea White is a doctoral student in the Social Dimensions of Health at the University of Victoria, Canada. Her research looks at community, memory and identity among the original membership of the Vancouver Mental Patients' Association. Her work has appeared in New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis, and she has been involved in organizing mad pride. She has experience involuntary detention under the mental health act, and has lived through ECT.

Shauna Winram- *Exploring psychosis in the context of global states of consciousness*

Consciousness arguably occurs in specific global states such as the normal waking state or REM dreaming. Global states are distinguished based on how creatures experience various domains of consciousness, such as level of arousal; quality of contents; and the experience of time and attention. This research explores whether psychosis is a distinct global state. Sixty-four participants who had experienced psychosis completed a survey. Part One of the survey measured 13 domains of consciousness. Participants' answers reflected how these domains during psychosis differed from their normal experience. Hierarchical cluster analysis was performed with SPSS software which resulted in the participants being divided into three clusters based on these domain scores. If psychosis were a distinct global state, then individual experiences of psychosis would have similar ratings regarding the domains. However, the clusters show that the sample can be subdivided and determining whether the sample or clusters are explanatorily privileged is difficult. Additionally, interviews with participants show variations in domains during psychosis suggesting that psychosis consists of a range of diverse experiences. While the findings from the survey and interviews suggest that psychosis is not a distinct global state, they also suggest that the concept of a global state may need revision.

I am a PhD philosophy candidate at the Australian National University with lived experience of psychosis who explores how our philosophical and scientific understanding of consciousness sheds light on psychosis.

Forrest Wolfe (pen name for Luke Blanchford) - *A Black at once Revelatory and Mundane: depression, night and mystery*

Black. I first encountered this in depression, in the wistful desire for oblivion. I also encountered this in psychotic collapse, as a vision of a blind spot, a gap through which I fell into a manic realm of divine, poetically “apocalyptic” signs. Is this black simply oblivion, trauma or melancholia? Perhaps the ways we name things can kill us. Especially the ineffable, the indiscernible. Louis Sass used Wittgenstein's metaphor of the eye to clarify some kinds of delusion schizophrenics have. “The eye nowhere appears in its field”, and yet in some sense, the ‘I’ is ‘seen’ by the psychotic and mis-recognized as quasi-mystical experience. I adopt this metaphor of the eye to elaborate on the “blind spot” in being, knowledge and language – and perform this in relation to my own experiences of madness. I wish to invoke other writers who wrote on night – Levinas, Badiou, Kristeva – as infinite other, as void, as chora, as daimon. To perform this black, not simply in its errancy, but its imbrication

with love and fidelity – a black at once revelatory and mundane, by which one cohabits with depression and sanity.

Forrest Wolfe is the pen name for Luke Blanchford. His creative nonfiction book on madness, Question for Werewolves, will be published in the U.S. in May 2026 by RIZE Press.

Nico Wuyts - *The Psychotic State, Ritual Communication and Early Development*

Due to the manufactured nature of my psychotic state I have learned to tap into improved communication with my subconsciousness, greatly increasing my affinity for social and behavioral signals. Within a controlled environment my body can tap into the subconscious learning center of the human body and achieve partial control of the brain's central nervous capabilities. These experiences, after training, can be understood as communication with a second EGO functioning independently in the brain, to the point of controlling the pain stimulus and the spatial and temporal awareness. My hypothesis is that the Psychotic State as defined by contemporary medical practice can be identified as the Gnostic State existing in various cross-cultural ritual traditions. I will defend this thesis with help of Bicameral mind theory and recent cognitive development and contemporary understanding of individual consciousness (based on 20th Century Harvard Psychiatrist Julia Jayne: "The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bi-cameral Mind."). In my presentation I will use language as ritual communication and I will refer to societal structures as a cognitive base for conscious and subconscious acting and as the possibility for engineering social eventualities. In addition I will explore magical and metaphorical thinking, material speech and the cognitive toolkit of prehistoric cooperative societal organisation.

Nico Joris Marie-Rose Wuyts, artist name: Niko Wuyts AKA The Rebel King. First Psychosis: December 25th 2016. Artistic lens: Collective Human Consciousness. Experience: Psychiatric experiences in 4 EU member states. Background: Pre-Information Age Organizational Structures.

Lindsey Beth Zelvin - *'Ana' and Me: A Medical Exorcism of Anorexia Nervosa*

In the worst moments of my eating disorder, my mother stopped using my name. Instead, she addressed 'Ana', short for anorexia. This was how she identified the demon possessing her teenage daughter, a desperate attempt to separate the child she loved from the monster in her place. 'Ana' was the enemy, an entity bent on destruction who could be fought and slain. Her defeat would save me, bringing me back from the edge of the abyss. 'Ana' wasn't me. She was other. Evil. But this wasn't entirely true. In *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics*, Arthur Frank writes "The personal issue of telling stories about illness is to give voice to the body so that the changed body can become once again familiar... But as the language of the story seeks to make the body familiar, the body eludes language" (Frank 1995, 2). Since being diagnosed with anorexia nervosa at fourteen, my body has been a subject for scrutiny, a site of pathology, and a source of shame. Eating disorders are intensely embodied mental illnesses. Sufferers find themselves trapped in liminal spaces, with body and mind constantly at odds. Crossing this divide and articulating these contradictory experiences is made even more difficult as one strives for "recovery", a loaded term that often prioritizes the condition of a person's body over that of their mind. The dichotomy established by this hierarchy often creates permanent disconnection between the two. In this paper, I trace the progress of my eating disorder—personified as 'Ana'—from secondary symptom to formal diagnosis, "recovery", and chronic illness, to examine the ways in which the language used around my illness distanced me from my body, causing me to view it as something to be dealt with rather than lived in.

Lindsey Zelvin completed her PhD in Narrative Nonfiction at the University of Kent. Her hybrid memoir uses interdisciplinary methodologies to approach more authentic and ethical representations of chronic mental illness.