

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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Title: Shifting Roots: Reimagining the Genealogical Roots of Disability Studies and Mad Studies through Women of Color Feminisms.

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This dissertation argues for rooting genealogies and origin stories of Disability Studies and Mad Studies in women of color feminist scholarship-activism. Turning to women of color feminist work as “alternative origin stories” shifts Disability Studies and Mad Studies away from limiting and often racist eurowestern models of Madness/disability. Women of color feminisms incite me to interrogate assumptions of Madness/disability as the “objects” of Disability Studies and Mad Studies, as well as assumptions of “humanization” as a primary aim of disabled scholarship-activism. Specifically, I demonstrate how the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Maxine Hong Kingston shift conceptual, methodological, pedagogical, and activist frameworks on Madness/disability. Through discursive analysis of their work, I foreground women of color feminist literary, poetic, and activist methods for theorizing Madness/disability as

always already racialized, classed, and gendered. I argue that storying women of color feminist work as genealogical roots of Disability Studies and Mad Studies reveals how the constructions and ongoing histories of race, gender, and Madness/disability are inextricably intertwined, such that Madness/disability cannot be understood apart from other aspects of identity, embodiment, positionality, and marginalization. Shifting to women of color feminisms as genealogical roots implicates Mad Studies and Disability Studies in ongoing US white supremacist settler colonial cisheteropatriarchy and exhorts Mad/disabled scholar-activists to address and intervene on interlocking systems of oppression. Women of color feminisms reveal that the radical potential of Madness/disability lies in the ways that othered and marginalized bodymind difference generatively confuses binary categories of eurowestern worldview and creates alternative modalities for living, being, and relating outside of white supremacist colonial cisheteropatriarchal normativity.

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Shifting Roots: Reimagining the Genealogical Roots of Disability Studies
and Mad Studies through Women of Color Feminisms

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Lzz Johnk

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Lzz Johnk, Author

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from when my scholar-activist journeys take arduous paths, sharp turns, and bewildering meanderings.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my brother Mike, my cousin Gavin, my Great Aunt Loretta, and my Great Aunt Lorene, who showed me that dreaming is a trans-realm modality and dreams are omni-realm spacetimes.

Chapter One: Introduction: Shifting Roots

If we are to live audaciously, we need to step into the calm eye of the storm, and steer by the stars, to imagine in rich detail, the biggest, most delicious, satisfying, inclusive future that we can, a great flowering of human potential and wellbeing, project our hearts and minds into that future, and then spend our lives walking toward it, and each time the weather buffets us, wait for a glimpse of sky, find that bright point of light, and adjust our course. But in order for that dream to be accurate, to burn bright enough for navigation, it needs to be rooted in the reality of here and now, all of it.

—Aurora Levins Morales, “Tai: A Yom Kippur Sermon” (2017, np)

White anthropologists claim that Indians have “primitive” and therefore deficient minds, that we cannot think in the higher mode of consciousness—rationality. They are fascinated by what they call the “magical” mind, the “savage” mind, the *participation mystique* of the mind that says the world of the imagination—the world of the soul—and of the spirit is just as real as physical reality. In trying to become “objective,” Western culture made “objects” of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing “touch” with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence.

—Gloria Anzaldúa (2012, 59)

“If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise, is discounted as a luxury, then we give up the core—the fountain—of our power, our womanness; we give up the future of our worlds. For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt—of examining what those ideas feel like being lived on Sunday morning at 7 A.M., after brunch, during wild love, making war, giving birth, mourning our dead—while we suffer the old longings, battle the old warnings and fears of being silent and impotent and alone, while we taste new possibilities and strengths.”

—Audre Lorde (“Poetry is Not a Luxury,” *Sister Outsider*, 39)

Introduction

Lately I can’t stop thinking about Madness. In particular, I have been thinking about the difference between a lowercase “madness” and an uppercase “Madness.”

Uppercase “Mad” (as well as uppercase “Crazy”) is gaining traction as an identification in liberal, progressive, and so-called radical circles. With increasing frequency I notice (primarily white) people calling themselves “Mad/Crazy” on social media and then

repeating (neo)liberal, racist, and sanist/ableist ideologies, for instance, that they are Mad *and yet* high-achieving, or that the racism of white supremacists is pathological—as if whitestream notions of “intellect,” “achievement,” and “pathology” are not anti-Black capitalist colonial constructions. These are not examples of the radical potential of Madness/disability; where can meaningful examples be located? The impetus for this dissertation is a desire to grapple with and pursue the radical potential of Madness/disability for collective struggle and revolution. Mad Black scholar La Marr Jurelle Bruce identifies Madness as a site of “radical potentiality” that—when contextualized via entangled histories of Madness/disability as racialized and race as Madded/disabled—can nurture radical imagination and coalition building for (Mad Black) liberation (2021). In pursuit of their radical potential of Madness/disability, I think through Madness/disability and as modalities and spacetimes from which to generate radical solidarities across non-normative expressions of bodymindspirit difference against anti-Blackness and white supremacist settler colonialism and toward radical, just futures. If it sounds crazy to say that working towards Native Sovereignty and Black Liberation will bring an end to the settler state—then maybe it is. If so, then what Bruce calls Mad methodologies can be enacted both variously and collectively in struggles for justice. While I did not name them “Mad methodologies” at the time I first read them, women of color feminist scholarship-activism contains numerous examples of, and implications for, methodologies rooted in Madness/disability, not only in understanding the mutual constitution of sanism/ableism with other interlocking systems of oppression but for resisting and uprooting their hegemonic power.

My introduction to the idea of Madness as political, as a theorizable aspect of identity, embodiment, and positionality, came from reading Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. It was an Anzaldúan analytic that enabled me to see my own experiences as a Mad person as political and politicizable. It was an Anzaldúan analytic that elucidated Madness as an experiential thread which connects me to many different people whose bodymindspirits, communities, and lived experiences vary widely—including from my own—and yet this experiential thread of connection fosters empathy, mutual aid, and activist impulse.¹ Anzaldúa was my introduction to what I have since come to know as “Mad Studies,” and *Borderlands/La Frontera* was the first “Mad Studies” text I read in graduate school, one which sparked a mutual recognition of the radical potential of Madness. Admittedly, this story is not a typical origin story I critique below that speaks of the “pioneering new development” of Mad Studies, which, along with Disability Studies, has apparently only just “emerg[ed] in the 21st century” (Beresford 2016, 350); rather, I seek “alternative origin stories” in women of color feminist genealogies.

In this dissertation, I engage women of color feminisms as genealogical roots for Mad Studies and Disability Studies. As I discuss below, there is growing evidence that Mad/Disability Studies are beginning to (re)center and (re)turn to women of color feminisms as genealogical roots and to unpack their implications for radical, anti-racist Mad/disabled transformative futures. However, this work often remains marginalized by the whitestream tendency to position Disability Studies and Mad Studies as “new”

¹ Examples of Mad/crip of color mutual aid include Miss Major's monthly fundraising circle (Friends of Miss Major n.d.) and Aurora Levins Morales' patreon (Levins n.d). (I discuss where Mad/crip of color theory comes from further below.)

fields of scholar-activist inquiry, disconnected from women of color feminisms, which are framed as dealing with gender and race but not disability.² Furthermore, women of color feminist discussion and theorization of spirituality is especially ignored, stigmatized, and marginalized in academia; even as the term “bodymind” becomes more prevalent, many academics tend to neglect “spirit,” selectively citing women of color feminist work to avoid critical engagement with spirituality under (often racist and sanist/ableist) assumptions that “spirituality” equates to “New Age” balderdash. There can also be reluctance to discuss women of color feminists as “Mad” and “disabled” because of the very structures and histories which they critique—that is, the medicalization and pathologization of racialized people as crazy, incompetent, deviant, and deficient.

By “Mad,” I mean in part “those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal,’” especially those confines that are supposed to keep our minds all kinds of straight, our sanity secure, our trauma hidden away (Anzaldúa 2012, 25). “Mad” is a reclaimed term used by people who identify variously as mentally disabled, mentally ill, psychiatric survivors, neurodivergent, psychocrip, and so forth (Costa 2014; Price 2011; Fabris 2011). Although not all Mad people identify as disabled and not all disabled people identify as Mad, my project grapples with the ways these identities and expressions are often entangled and how these places of entanglement can generate radical solidarities across Madnesses, disabilities, neurodivergences, and other

² As I discuss below, Ferguson argues how a similar phenomenon has occurred in whitestream queer theory, in which women of color feminisms are neglected as genealogical roots and white scholars are named as the “founders” of queer theory (2005).

non-normative expressions of bodymindspirit. My use of “bodymindspirit”³ comes from Gloria Anzaldúa, who uses this language in her critique of “the Cartesian split” of “body” from “mind” (with “spirit” rationalized into “mind” or otherwise ignored altogether in much eurowestern Enlightenment philosophy) (2012, 59). My understanding of bodymindspirit is also informed by scholar-activists of color who argue that many Indigenous cosmologies did not and do not recognize any validity in Cartesian duality and other binary aspects of eurowestern colonial cosmology. In “Sweet Dark Places: Letters to Gloria Anzaldúa on Disability, Creativity, and the Coatlicue State,” Mad/crip of color⁴ artist-scholars Aurora Levins Morales, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha confront the spurious nature of the body/mind split by taking up Anzaldúa’s use of “bodymindspirit” to denote how, within their overlapping cosmologies of community, home, and materiality, these facets of perception and experience are inseparable, and in fact they lose meaning when we attempt to conceive of them separately (2012). Similar to writing “bodymindspirit” together, I use “spacetime,” one word, because it isn’t only useful for the study of physics to think space and time together to understand realities; joining them reminds me that the material impacts of stories flow across time and space, or as Saidiya Hartman says, “the past is not yet over” (2007, 18).

A key analytic of my work, “compulsory able-bodymindedness” stems from this interrogation of Cartesian duality, constituting a threading-together of what Disability

³ In fairness, at times I use “bodymind” as a shorthand for “bodymindspirit.”

⁴ As I expand on below, Mad/crip of color critique has been theorized by Jina B. Kim and Liat Ben-Moshe to name “an alliance” between “women-of-color / queer-of-color feminist and disability theorizing” (Kim 2017, np; see also Ben-Moshe 2020).

Studies scholars Robert McRuer and Alison Kafer theorize as “compulsory able-bodiedness” (McRuer 2006; Kafer 2003) and what Mad Studies Scholar Margaret Price theorizes as “compulsory able-mindedness” (Price 2013). Compulsory able-bodiedmindedness works toward the resuturing of “body” and “mind,” as well as “spirit,” in Mad/Disability Studies frameworks. Sanism/ableism are also key analytics I engage in this dissertation. Following Disability Justice educator Mia Mingus’ critical work, Sasha Khan and I define sanism/ableism as “a system of oppression targeting disability, Madness, and neurodivergence” which “[works] with and through other oppressive logics,” including racism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, classism, anti-queerness, and misogyny (2019, 1). We assert that sanism/ableism

reifies the ideal bodymind of the settler colonial imaginary. The ideal bodymind is imagined to be rational, logical, articulate, capable, competent, healthy, well adjusted, normal, and productive. These characteristics are coded through what Audre Lorde refers to as “the mythical norm,” which is “defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure” (2007, 116). (ibid)

In tandem with the ways women of color feminists have brought me to understand the “body,” “mind,” and “spirit” as inseparable, Mad/crip of color theorists such as Qwo-Li Driskill have reframed my understanding of sanism and ableism as inseparable colonial logics (Morales, Driskill, and Piepzna-Samarasinha 2012, 84). Liat Ben-Moshe names the entanglement of sanism/ableism and colonialism as “race-ability,” which she defines as “the ways race and disability, and racism, sanism, and ableism as intersecting oppressions, are mutually constitutive and cannot be separated, in their genealogy (eugenics, for example), current iterations of resistance (in the form of disability justice, for example), or oppression (incarceration and police killing, for

example)” (2020, 5). I write sanism/ableism together in recognition of these entanglements.

As academic fields brought about by Mad/disabled activism—including women of color feminist activism—Mad Studies and Disability Studies tend to theorize Madness/disability in ways that resist medical model approaches to disability, or disability as an individual pathology in need of cure. While I respect the ways that contributors positioning themselves within each of these fields discuss unique frameworks and areas of concern for Mad and disabled communities, I am interested in the ways Mad Studies and Disability Studies not only mutually inform each other but generate spacetimes of intimate overlap and possibilities for what Black feminist Cathy Cohen calls “radical coalition work” (1997, 453). When referring to commonalities or overlap of both fields, I write them together as Mad/Disability Studies. Joining them in this way also creates a blurriness that is useful for disrupting the neatness of disciplinary boundaries that the colonial academy is invested in maintaining. At times, I let one or both fields float to the surface by naming them separately.

In the chapters that follow, I reimagine the genealogical roots of Mad Studies and Disability Studies through the works of three women of color feminist writers: Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Maxine Hong Kingston. My research and writing engage the concept of genealogy through frameworks theorized by scholar-activists working from Black Studies, Asian and Asian American Studies, Chican@ Studies, Native Studies, Queer Studies, and Mad/crip of color critique. By turning to Anzaldúa, Lorde, and Kingston as Mad/disabled ancestors of color, I demonstrate how women of color feminist work fundamentally intervenes into Enlightenment logics and empowers

the transformative potential of Madness/disability⁵ as the center from which radical Mad/disabled imagination and anti-racist Mad/Disability Studies scholarship-art-activism can begin. To be clear, I do not mean that Anzaldúa, Lorde, and Kingston are “my” ancestors or that their ancestral traditions are my ancestral traditions; rather, I acknowledge the ways they are identified as ancestors by communities of color, as exemplified by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in *Care Work* when she says that she includes Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde (along with Frida Kahlo, Leslie Feinberg, and other Mad/disabled artist-activists) as Mad/crip ancestors on her altar (2018). In Chapter Two, I engage Anzaldúa’s work as a genealogical root of Mad Studies and Disability Studies by attending to examples of how her spiritual activist imaginary illuminates theoretical and practical frameworks for understanding Madness/disability and their spiritual activist potential. I focus on her discussion of *sueños y ensueños* and what she calls “images” to argue for a (re)centering of spiritual activism within Mad/disabled scholarship-activism. In Chapter Three, I offer a Mad reading of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* to locate enactments of Lorde’s Mad Black poetic methods—what I am calling scrambling and of what Lorde calls “dis/crazure” (1980, 14)—which confuse the bounds of self/Other and open the radical potentiality of Madness/disability for coalitional futures. In Chapter Four, I offer a Mad reading of Kingston’s memoir *The Woman Warrior: A Girlhood Among Ghosts* to engage her enactment of what I read as a Mad Asian American modality. I unpack the practical and theoretical significance of two methods she enacts through this modality—

⁵ I generally refer to Madness and disability as Madness/disability (or Mad/disabled), joined with a slash mark, to indicate the interconnectedness of these embodiments or positionalities.

blurring and confusion—for Mad Studies and Disability Studies. My aim is to respond to the ways women of color feminist scholarship-art-activism incites radical imagination, healing, and social transformation, as well as to unpack the implications of these practices and modalities for Mad/disabled community-building and Mad/Disability Studies.

Shifting

My dissertation conducts its textual analysis in the form of *shifting*, an Anzaldúan analytic and practice which facilitates moving toward different genealogical roots and imaginaries. I identify Anzaldúa’s call to “[n]ow let us shift” as both a method and methodology for Mad/disabled scholar-activist genealogies (2002), such that the will to shift anchors my methodological framing of genealogy-as-reimagining and shifting, itself, is a method for noticing, which allows other roots to become visible at the surface. Shifting to a Mad/Disability Studies perspective rooted in women of color feminisms at minimum increases inclusivity by making previously illegible work recognizable as Mad/Disability Studies, but perhaps even more importantly, such a shift clarifies what is at stake for those of us as scholars, artists, and activists engaging in these fields—which I hear women of color feminisms articulate as complete social transformation, including the end and dismantling of industrial complexes, borders, perpetual war, environmental racism, cisheteronormativity, and the settler state.

Genealogies

I am indebted to the labor of Black, Brown, and Indigenous scholar-activists whose work directs me to read, write, and relate beyond the prescribed whitestream canon of Mad/Disability Studies. I join these ongoing conversations and attempt to

honor the work of those who have already made important interventions. This work must be ongoing, such that all Mad/Disability Studies scholars—not only those who are Black, Brown, and Native—engage genealogical interventions that demand a shift in our roots.

Sometimes our intellectual genealogies are passed down to us from those who made the way before us, an inheritance made salient to us through stories and retellings. Native feminists Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill model one way to honor such inheritance when they recount how the Native feminist theories they engage “come from a long line of activism and intellectual thought” which “have thrived in the past five decades,” despite whitemainstream feminism’s attempts to obscure them (2013, 11). On the other hand, sometimes we have to dig for those stories, which become intentionally obscured by systems of power and those who benefit from them (e.g. whitemainstream academia). Sometimes it is not made obvious to us who our scholar-activist ancestors are. In this case, the words of transnational feminists of color M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty are a keen reminder that it is not always the case that we “inherit our intellectual neighborhoods” but rather “we consciously build them” (1997, ix).

My approach to genealogical methods and methodologies are also framed by my engagements with Indigenous scholar-activists who understand genealogy as inextricable from community: who claims you as a Mad/Disability Studies root can have as much weight as self-positioning with Mad/Disability Studies. For my purposes here, I turn toward and converse with Mad/Disability Studies scholars who claim Gloria

Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde as possible roots of these fields.⁶ Mad/Black Studies scholar Therí A. Pickens' project in *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, while not explicitly described as genealogical, enacts claiming in this way by “unearthing where disability appears in Black studies and where Blackness appears in disability studies” (2019, 10); she includes Audre Lorde among those whose work speaks to the “wide constellation of critical relationships between Blackness and disability” (ibid). In his chapter “Coming Out Crip: Malibu is Burning,” Robert McRuer hails Anzaldúa as a crip theorist (2006). Alison Kafer briefly analyzes Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* as Disability Studies scholarship (2013). Aurora Levins Morales, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha take up Anzaldúan concepts to theorize the connections between disability, racism, colonialism, and sanism/ableism in their intimate letters to her (2012). Scholar-artist and community healer Kai Cheng Thom, whose work I read as Mad, “stole the books [she] wanted so bad” and that were critical for her survival; she cites the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde among these (2017, 69). So, too, does Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha invoke the names of Anzaldúa and Lorde as “sick and disabled ancestors” in *Care Work* (2018, 12). I find myself in conversation with these invocations and I hope to build upon the work of these scholar-activists who remember Anzaldúa, Lorde, and other women of color feminists as theorists of disability and Madness.

⁶ Anzaldúa, Lorde, and Kingston are certainly not the only women of color feminists whose work can and should be taken up as genealogical roots for Mad/Disability Studies. In the future, I also aim to the Mad/Disability Studies potentialities within the works of Paula Gunn Allen, Kate Rushin, and June Jordan. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha directs us to turn to Mad/disabled trans ancestors of color, as well.

By genealogy, I mean both (in this case Mad/Disability Studies) histories and the tracing that produces those histories. Because I am attempting to intervene upon an existing disciplinary “canon” of Mad Studies and Disability Studies, I frame my “telling-against” in terms of what Cherokee poet-scholar Qwo-Li Driskill describes as an “uncanon,” or the articulation of other origin stories “outside the canon” of a discipline (Driskill 2018).⁷ My genealogical approach draws upon Roderick Ferguson’s project of situating women of color feminisms, as well as Black feminist historiographers who expand upon them (e.g. Evelyn Hammonds), as roots from which the study of sexuality has sprung across multiple disciplines (2005). His project enables the theorization of sexuality as an “epistemological effect of women of color feminism,” such that sexuality can no longer be held as the object of certain fields—what Ferguson calls its “presumed proprietors” (e.g. psychoanalysis, queer studies)—but is instead a discourse which cannot “be reduced to disciplinary or interdisciplinary agents” (2005, 87). Turning to Ferguson’s theorizations, along with genealogical interventions offered by Mad/disabled scholar-activists of color, challenges the origin stories currently circulated by whitestream Mad Studies and Disability Studies; this prompts me to seek alternative origin stories through an uncanon rooted in women of color feminisms. I argue that telling different stories about these fields through women

⁷ Driskill first named the concept of “uncanon” for me and my peers in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies course 617: Multiracial, Transnational, and Queer Feminisms II at Oregon State University in the Winter Quarter of 2018. Other writers I have seen use this term include queer feminist musicologist Hannah Reardon-Smith, who mobilizes “uncanon” to mean “*remember[ing] anew* the radical truths” of a multitude of diverse narratives in order to “[insert] a subversive wedge into the dominant narrative” (2019, 1, emphasis in original).

of color feminisms works to dislodge Madness/disability as the “objects” of those fields.

While examining a different disciplinary lineage from my project, I read Angela Davis’ *Blue Legacies and Black Feminism* as another project that models shifting as a genealogical method (1998). Davis traces a root of feminism to queer Black blues women in the 1920s and 30s whose music and queer aesthetic practices continue to influence feminist activism today, thus enacting an important genealogical intervention in feminist studies by disrupting whitestream feminist canons that exclude, ignore, and suppress Black feminist roots. She discusses three feminist roots that sprout from the legacies of Black blues women, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday, arguing that identifying such feminist ancestors reframes the stakes of today’s feminisms by pointing out that they must be Black-centered, queer-informed, and anti-racist. Understanding that shifting is a genealogical method, my will to shift is catalyzed by Davis’ project, which informs my approach to reimagining the genealogical roots of Mad/Disability Studies by naming specific “uncanon” intellectual ancestors that require us to shift the boundaries and the stakes of these fields.

My genealogical intervention is also informed by transnational feminist scholar-activist Patti Duncan’s theorization of “genealogies of unbelonging” through which she recovers the “strategically forg[otten]” genealogies of Korean adoptees by interrogating the relationship between ongoing U.S. militarism in South Korea and the gendered, racialized process of transnational adoption between South Korea and the United States (2010, 296). In US academia, Duncan’s assertions about “strategically for[gotten]” genealogies are not merely metaphorically related to the relationship between

Mad/Disability Studies and women of color feminisms: these strategies of “forgetting” sustained the conditions for the white supremacist colonial academy to neglect (and very likely exacerbate) Audre Lorde and June Jordan’s experiences of illness while extracting their labor as Black feminists (Gumbs 2012; Gumbs 2014). Drawing upon Duncan’s work, I write in consideration of “fractur[ed]...kinship ties” between Mad/Disability Studies and women of color feminisms (ibid).

Further, this dissertation is a project of genealogical reimagining in that I am participating in and expanding my imaginary through ongoing conversations about the white-dominated nature of Mad/Disability Studies which precludes serious engagement with and centering of women of color feminisms and “Other” radical thought that comes from Black, Brown, Native, and Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and trans people. Grappling with the critical challenges posed by women of color feminists facilitates the labor of growing our imaginaries. Throughout the course of my doctoral program, I was encouraged to pursue a genealogical methodology of questioning—questioning canon, questioning origin stories—and apply its implications to my own research. Approaching Mad/Disability Studies through this methodological lens exhorts me to recognize and critically challenge the whiteness, cisness, and class privilege that has predominated in these fields. Indeed, the very legibility of a scholar’s work as Mad/Disability Studies has often relied upon that person’s whiteness, as well as their position within the academy (hence the oversaturation of whitestream “canon”—not coincidentally the canon with the money and clout to get published—with white theorists). This is despite the fact that Mad/disabled people (including Mad/disabled academics) have recognized the many sanist/ableist mechanisms and strategies by

which eurowestern academia has intentionally weeded us out (Price 2011; Khúc 2013; Domage 2017).

Another of my aims is to respond to crip theorist Sami Schalk's exhortation to "allow black feminist" and women of color feminist theories "to transform the field[s]" of Mad Studies and Disability Studies (2018, 4). As we see in the aforementioned projects of Davis and Ferguson, as well as many others, when women of color feminisms are (re)centered as genealogical roots, they facilitate important interventions against dominant narratives within and radically transform the work of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Queer Studies (Cohen 1997; Dunye 1997; Muñoz 1999; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015). For instance, rethinking Madness and disability not as the objects of Mad Studies and Disability Studies but as (at least in part) an "effect" of women of color feminism facilitates a more accurate analysis of the ways Madness/disability are inflected by and co-constructed with race, gender, sexuality, and class (Ferguson 2005, 86-87). In this vein, I am also prompted to turn toward women of color feminisms as a genealogical root of Mad/Disability Studies by a question posed by Black Mad/Disability Studies scholar-activist Therí Alyce Pickens: "To what aesthetic practices and thinkers do we need to turn to expand our imaginations" around "the relationship between race and disability" (2019, 3)? Thus, my project here attempts a genealogical reimagining of the roots of Mad/Disability Studies through women of color feminisms as a way to shift theory, methodology, pedagogy, activism, and imaginary.

Dreams, Spiritual Activism, and Mad Dream Reading

As Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other women of color feminists have demonstrated in concrete, material, and practicable ways, spirituality is a powerful force that academia—along with the flexible, assimilating, hegemonic entity called “white culture”—understands very poorly. As Anzaldúa asserts in the epigraph above, this failure to understand comes in part from academia’s continued investment in eurowestern white supremacist colonial worldview, including its investment in the Cartesian body/mind split. The “failure to understand” is itself white supremacist and colonial, and in any case it is a willful ignorance: those of us in the academic world are aware on some level that the spiritual must be reckoned with but doing so (e.g. shifting away from white supremacist colonial desires and Enlightenment values) means giving up power. Anzaldúa’s work illuminates how this awareness and willful forgetting is one of many reasons why and how academia degrades “body” and “spirit” as “primitive” and “magical,”⁸ associating these with Indigeneity and thus separate from and lower than “mind,” which gatekeepers of academia associate with “enlightened” eurowestern white supremacist colonialism. “Magical thinking,” she writes, “is not traditionally valued in academic writing” (2015, 5). Anzaldúa theorizes and enacts healing processes for transforming this violently imposed “perception”—for “revising...what is real, what is just and fair”—as part of

⁸ “Magical” in the white supremacist eurowestern worldview means “unreal” or “fictional.” My own use of magic resonates with Anzaldúa’s spiritual activist framing of “magic” as a “theory of knowledge” (2015, 32). Writing about her ancestral traditions, she engages *nagualismo* as “[a] type of Mesoamerican magic supernaturalism...an alternative epistemology, a folk theory of knowledge conditioned by a long-standing ideology and belief system. *Nagualismo*’s basic assumptions (worldview) are shapeshifting (the ability to become an animal or thing) and traveling to other realities. These journeys require a different kind of ‘seeing’: the ability to perceive the world in a- different way, the perceptual experience of what Carlos Castaneda calls ‘nonordinary’ reality” (ibid). She guides me to imagine the radical potential of Madness as a form of magic that I practice through my own ancestral traditions.

her framework for spiritual activism (2015, 21). Putting these two words together (“spiritual” and “activism”) is counterintuitive within the context of whitestream academia, even within Mad/Disability Studies. By putting these two words together, Anzaldúa creates a vision and practice for “revising reality,” transforming our “selves” and society, and “choosing a different future”: as she makes clear, “by choosing a different future, we bring it into being” (2015, 21).

This project comes from a desire to remember, understand, and fulfill my reasons for being here. This is a spiritual desire in that these reasons are spiritual reasons. These reasons are spiritual because we are connected to each other through spirit, even if whitestream academia tries to suppress that knowing. They are spiritual reasons which have material implications in everyday life. Much of my intellectual, activist, and imaginal understanding of these reasons and how they are connected to the reasons of other people participating in this resistance to the whitestream comes from the scholarship-activism of women of color feminisms. It is clear to me why the world of academia feels so threatened by women of color feminists: their work holds insights, tools, and practices for transforming society. Try as academia does to keep them out, women of color feminists have infiltrated academic realms and planted the seeds of radical imagination and revolutionary vision.

I acknowledge that it is risky as a white settler to write about women of color feminists as spiritual activists, not least because my positionality is linked to that of the white anthropologists Anzaldúa critiques above through the ongoing project of white supremacist settler colonialism. I am not interested in the spiritual because (like many eurowestern and protestant christians believe, for example) it is another world separate

from this one that I can escape to through fantasy or via the afterlife. The spiritual world *is this world*, and my spiritual choices have material impacts on myself, other people, and our planet as a whole. As I discuss in this dissertation, Anzaldúa, Lorde, and Kingston are not writing about and creating immaterial realities; their imaginal realities materially shape our shared “reality” by “altering our consensual agreements about what is real, what is just and fair” (Anzaldúa 2015, 21). Whiteman academia and its gatekeepers will admit to and cherry-pick the power of the imagination when it serves them, but both degrade and appropriate the spiritual activism, visionary imagination, and creativity of women of color feminists. This is a way for white settlers, including whiteman academics, to maintain power and control while ignoring and (often violently) suppressing the implications and practice of spiritual activism.

Anzaldúa asserts that the imagination and its realities are not truly separable from other modalities for sensing, perceiving, and understanding; as she recounts, the imaginal is the “underworld” to the physical/material “upper world” not in the hierarchal sense of eurowestern colonial worldview (which subordinates the material to the rational/intellectual) but in that the “upper world” is rooted in and expands/grows out of the “underworld.” Her understanding of this linked relationship is embodied by “el árbol de la vida,” the “cosmic tree”:

The tree is a link between worlds. Just as the cosmic tree connects under, - middle, - and upper world, I’ll connect this essay’s sections: from the roots to the ground and up its trunk to the branches and on to the sky, a journey from the depths of the underworld that ascends to the concrete physical world, and then to the upper realities of spirit, in a constant descend /ascend movement. But the problem with this up/down, linear description is that these three worlds aren’t separate. Interconnected and overlapping, *they occupy the same place*. (2015, 25, emphasis mine)

Anzaldúa's spiritual activism is rooted in her spiritual, imaginal, material, and intellectual experience as una mestiza who traverses multiple realities out of necessity for survival. She articulates her journeys as a "two-way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015 [1981], 208). She expands on the meaning of "going deep into the self" in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*:

Imagination opens the road to both personal and societal change—transformation of self, consciousness, community, culture, society. We have different kinds of imaginings, each with similar yet different processes: a political process of imagining, a spiritual process of imagining, and an aesthetic process of imagining. Without imagination, transformation would not be possible. Without creativity, "other" epistemologies—those of the body, dreams, intuitions, and senses other than the five physical senses—would not reach consciousness. (Anzaldúa 2015, 44)

Anzaldúa is a Mad feminist ancestor of color whose work continually incites me to participate in inner/collective struggle, which includes the process of expanding my imaginary. For me this means approaching Madness and Mad practices such as Mad reading through Anzaldúa's spiritual activist frameworks.

As I discuss further in Chapter Two, Anzaldúa roots her conceptualization of spiritual activism, psychic transformation, and her search for images in her Indigenous, Chicana and Tejana, ancestral traditions. In the context of grappling with the multiple, complex violences surrounding 9/11, she writes, "I struggle to talk from the wound's gash, make sense of the deaths and destruction, and pull the pieces of my life back together. I yearn to pass on to the next generation the spiritual activism I've inherited from my cultures" (2015, 10). Throughout her work, she clearly names her culturally

rooted images (e.g. Coyolxauhqui, el árbol de la vida) and situates them within her queer Chicana feminist theorization of the border culture in which she was raised. I do not read her yearning to “pass on...spiritual activism” as an invitation to take up images that do not belong to me; rather, I understand her spiritual activist framework as a guide for each of us to re-collect the images of our particular ancestral traditions with the collective goal of social transformation. My ongoing work is to engage her arguments about how and why shifting *matters* as a spiritual activist practice for social change. I argue that engaging women of color feminist theorization of images, dreams, and spiritual activism within Mad/Disability Studies recenters queer, trans, and women of color experiences and spiritual activist leadership. Spiritual activist methods and methodologies also expand Mad/Disability Studies imaginaries of scholarly, pedagogical, and activist practices, shifting them closer to the radical activist impulse espoused by women of color feminisms.

By “Mad reading,” I mean reading (feeling) from the parts of my bodymindspirit which are scorned by white supremacist Enlightenment thought for their capacity to hold multiple perspectives at once and without judgment. Gloria Anzaldúa’s work theoretically and practically models such possibilities of multiple perception while holding together bodymindspirit. In *Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro*, she makes clear the stakes of her life’s work:

Using a multidisciplinary approach and a “storytelling” format, I theorize my own and others’ struggles for representation, identity, self-inscription, and creative expressions. When I “speak” myself in creative and theoretical writings, I constantly shift positions—which means taking into account ideological remolinos (whirlwinds), cultural dissonance, and the convergence of competing worlds. It means dealing with the fact that I, like most people, inhabit different cultures and, when crossing to other mundos, shift into and out of perspectives

corresponding to each; it means living in liminal spaces, in nepantlas. By focusing on Chicana/mestiza (mexicana tejana) experience and identity in several axes—writer/artist, intellectual, scholar, teacher, woman, Chicana, feminist, lesbian, working class— I attempt to analyze, describe, and recreate these identity shifts. Speaking from the geographies of many “countries” makes me a privileged speaker. I “speak in tongues”—understand the languages, emotions, thoughts, fantasies of the various sub-personalities inhabiting me and the various grounds they speak from. To do so, I must figure out which person (I, she, you, we, them, they), which tense (present, past, future), which language and register, and which voice or style to speak from. *Identity formation (which involves “reading” and “writing” oneself and the world) is an alchemical process that synthesizes the dualities, contradictions, and perspectives from these different selves and worlds.* (2015, 3, emphasis mine)

I have come to understand my practice as a Mad person through an Anzaldúan analytic, such that reading Madly means feeling for spirit in connection with bodymind, feeling for memories and healing images through my connections to other people and everything with/as spirit, and turning these ways of knowing into action together with my communities. Further, Black Studies scholar Therí Alyce Pickens’ conversations in *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* have enormously impacted my Mad/disabled imaginary and racial consciousness. She asserts that the aim of these conversations “is not to trace an idea or prove an argument”—though she traces many crucial ideas and arguments— “but rather to open up two fields to each other” (2019, x). My hope for this dissertation is to engage in this liminal spacetime she has opened up, including by responding to her call for Mad/Disability Studies scholars “to think about how we think when we think about Blackness and madness” (2019, xi). In order to dwell in this spacetime, she writes, “Dear reader, you may have to learn to think madly. Blackly” (ibid). Her resuturing of Blackness and Madness have shaped my understanding of what it means to read Madly and the stakes of this question, in particular how this is

inevitably linked to Blackness through ongoing histories of white supremacist US settler colonialism, genocide, and chattel slavery.

In this dissertation, I theorize what I am calling “Mad dream reading” as a methodology for engaging Pickens’ call to “think madly [and] Blackly” in consideration of my roles and responsibilities. My practice of Mad dream reading centers Anzaldúa’s concepts of spiritual activism in my writing, reading, and daydreaming to nurture creativity and imagination. Women of color feminisms lead me to understand that expanding our imaginaries is critical to our capacity for generating meaningful theory (awareness) that addresses the lived experiences of multiply marginalized people and intervenes upon differentials of power. Anzaldúa’s work demonstrates that social transformation is predicated upon inner change and struggle. Her vision for awareness-raising is simultaneously individual and collective. Knowing that she sees the “maimed, mad, and sexually different,” “the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, [and] the foreign” as spiritual kin (2012, 25, 60), I read her ability to hold these two realms—the individual and the collective—in heartmind at the same time as both a manifestation of the mestiza consciousness she theorizes in *Borderlands/La Frontera* and as a form of Mad gain. I also inhabit dreaming as form of Mad gain, as a Mad modality. As indicated in the epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter, there are long traditions of radical dreaming in women of color feminisms. Alexis Pauline Gumbs recounts that “Audre Lorde kept dream journals as a primary resource for her poetry. She describes writing ‘Power’ as a moment when keeping track of her dreams directly served her poetry, though she did

not see ‘Power’ as a poem until years later, after living through this complicated year in her life and in her teaching” (2014, 246).

My approach to Mad dreaming, Mad dream reading, and other Mad practices/modalities also grapples with radical possibilities for coalition- and kinship-making, per Cherokee literary scholar Daniel Heath Justice’s recounting that for many Indigenous people, becoming and being human is intimately tied to kinship. He asserts that “kinship isn’t just a thing, it’s an active network of connections, a process of continual acknowledgement and enactment. To be human is to practise humanness” (2018, nook page 51). I come from settler people—Welsh Friends, Irish, Germans, Norwegians—who have participated in myriad, complex ways in building and participating in the settler colonial state, including the perpetuation of eurowestern Enlightenment ideas of what it means “to be human.” Some of us in these families were/are also Mad, disabled, chronically ill. I try to reconnect with their memories, to respond to them through women of color feminist frameworks which direct me to imagine different futures than the ones laid out by white supremacist settler colonialism, in which we are either complicit in these structures and logics or we stay or become poor, get separated from each other, spend time in mental institutions, die early deaths. I reject this limited binary view of the future and what women of color feminist and queer and trans scholar-activists of color identify as a *failure of imagination* that is used to justify white supremacist settler colonial violence.⁹ To nurture my imagination and collective radical imaginaries, I think through (and literally dream about) my roles and

⁹ This failure of imagination is embodied and enacted by, for instance, neoliberal capitalist Margaret Thatcher’s slogan “There Is No Alternative” (Flanders 2013).

responsibilities as a Mad agender white settler in relation to my work, art, communities, where I grew up, the places I've lived, and the people in my life. I was first encouraged to seriously figure out my roles and responsibilities through women of color feminisms, Native Studies, and decolonial studies during my MA program. This encouragement was expanded on during my doctoral studies, in particular by my teacher Qwo-Li Driskill, whose work conceptualizes "roles and responsibilities" relationally, per Shawn Wilson's theorization of relationality in *Research as Ceremony*. Each of their syllabi includes a section titled "Classroom Conduct and Citizenship" in which they state the expectation that students will "treat one another as relatives," framing this through Justice's concept of "critical kinship." Justice offers four questions to help his readers imagine possibilities of critical kinship, to which I keep returning as the years turn: "How do we learn to be human? How do we behave as good relatives? How do we become good ancestors? How do we learn to live together?" (2018, nook page 51). The implications of these questions continue to be shaped by the teaching and scholarship-activism of feminists of color, including my dissertation committee chair Patti Duncan, who models compassionate pedagogy in her classroom spaces, as well as my committee member Ron Mize's encouragement to engage women of color feminist work in a way that is, as Maria Lugones says, both loving and playful (Lugones 1987).

My dissertation scrutinizes the taken-for-granted separateness of Mad Studies/Disability Studies from women of color feminisms within the whitestream academic imaginary by reframing this relationship as kinship. Women of color feminisms encourage me to imagine Madness/disability as realms of radical, chosen kinship. Therefore, I have come to understand my own Madness as a potentially radical

modality through which I move towards what Anzaldúa describes as ways to “transform our world by imagining it differently, dreaming it passionately via all our senses, and willing it into creation” (2015, 20).¹⁰ In addition to a modality, I think about my embodiment of Madness as a role with attendant responsibilities; while in no way equivalent or able to be conflated, my conceptualization of Madness-as-role arises in part from Deborah Miranda’s framing of Two-Spirit as roles that come with responsibilities. In her pivotal work “Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California,” she explains:

Simply identifying as both Indian and gay does not make a person Two-Spirit, although it can be a courageous and important step; the danger of that assumption elides Two-Spirit responsibilities as well as the social and cultural needs of contemporary indigenous communities in relation to such issues as suicide rates, alcoholism, homelessness, and AIDS. What steps can we take to reconstruct our role in the larger indigenous community? (2010, 277)

Miranda’s framing helps me understand the stakes of claiming Madness as a radical identity, modality, or role. Identifying as “Mad” without acknowledging how sanism and “ableism [are] colonial,” as Driskill writes in “Sweet Dark Places” (2012, 84), is to individualize and depoliticize any radical potential latent in Madness—just as white supremacist neoliberal capitalist colonialism desires. For me to claim (not just experience) Madness is to say that I am working on myself, working within community,

¹⁰ My thinking about Madness as a modality and “Extermination of the Joyas,” Deborah Miranda ““Simply identifying as both Indian and gay does not make a person Two-Spirit, although it can be a courageous and important step; the danger of that assumption elides Two-Spirit responsibilities as well as the social and cultural needs of contemporary indigenous communities in relation to such issues as suicide rates, alcoholism, homelessness, and AIDS. What steps can we take to reconstruct our role in the larger indigenous community?” (277)

journeying towards queer horizons and “queer relational bliss” (Muñoz 2009, 25), “radical coalition work” (Cohen 1997, 453), and “crip futurity” (Kafer 2013).¹¹

Dissertating in a Pandemic

I locate myself in this work as a crazy person, as Mad. I’m a neurodivergent cousin of depressives and neuroqueers, Borderline, autistic, and ADHD folks, people with (C-)PTSD, psychos, maniacs, and “the Mentally Ill.” I have kinship with addicts, users, and those who kill themselves, among others affected by and weeded out from the neoliberally-regimented spacetime continuum of the american life trajectory, along which “life chances” are inequitably scattered, particularly for those at the racialized and gendered intersections of multiple marginalization (Cohen 1997; Spade 2015). My kinship with Mad, disabled, neuroqueer, and neurodivergent people mirrors what I perceive as the kinship between Mad Studies and Disability Studies in that we have mutual interests, responsibilities, and opportunities for alliance. As a Mad white eurowestern settler, I am doing the work of this project on stolen lands; as a student of Mad Studies and (especially feminist) Disability Studies whose understandings of these fields has been deeply informed by the stories of Black, Brown, and Native people, I have a responsibility to honor those stories through critical engagement with their implications for my own work and the scholarship, art, and activism of others positioning themselves within Mad Studies and Disability Studies. To these stories, I add my own.

¹¹ I am moved by Kafer’s contribution to a vision for “a crip politics of access and engagement that is resolutely a work in progress, open-ended, aiming for but never reaching the horizon” (2013, 18).

Writing a dissertation in a pandemic...where to begin. I cannot begin at “the beginning” because the pandemic did not start with Trump’s declaration of Covid-19 as a national emergency in the US on March 13, 2020. It did not start with WHO’s declaration of the pandemic as a global health emergency on January 31, 2020. It did not start with the announcement of a “mysterious coronavirus-related pneumonia in Wuhan, China” in early January 2020 (AJMC 2021, np). Could we mark the massive uptick in resource extraction and transnational capitalism since the second half of the 20th century (including the kinds of capitalist production and trade which bring humans into closer contact with commodified animals like cattle, bats, and pangolins¹²) as a kind of beginning for the Covid-19 pandemic? Or perhaps the rise of extractive imperialist and colonial trade in the 15th and 16th centuries? Without belaboring the point, all of these “beginnings” blur into each other, complicating the attempts of US hegemony to pinpoint blame for Covid-19 (on Asia and China, in particular). It is abundantly clear that ongoing histories of violent white supremacist capitalist colonialism and imperialism have created and sustained the conditions for what is happening in the world right now, even as Black, Brown, Indigenous people of color are being severely and disproportionately impacted by this pandemic. White settlers want to stay in this “present” that blames Asian people for Covid-19 and targets them for violence and also roll so far back in time that the pandemic is nobody’s fault—always skipping over the millennia we as white imperialists/colonizers and our ancestors have spent subordinating, commodifying, stealing (from), ransacking, invading, occupying,

¹² See “Did Pangolin Trafficking Cause the Coronavirus Pandemic?” (Quammen 2020), “Did Coronavirus Come from the Bat Guano Trade?” (Xie 2020), and “Coronaviruses in farm animals: Epidemiology and public health implications” (Khbou, et al. 2020).

removing, displacing, disabling, and killing people of color, their lands, and their communities. This willful forgetting obscures the ways white supremacist capitalist settler colonial structures and logics create the conditions in which Black, Brown, and Native communities experience abbreviated “life chances” through violence, exploitation, and the intentional withholding of the material means to live (Cohen 1997, 440).

Women of color and Third World feminists have been writing, speaking, and theorizing about these violent conditions of ongoing white supremacist capitalist (settler) colonial cisheteropatriarchy for decades—for centuries and even millennia if we trace these genealogies back to the radical ancestors who made the way for them, including Zora Neale Hurston (Walker 2011), Charlotte Forten Grimké (Royster 1994), Harriet Tubman (The Harriet Tubman Collective 2017; The Combahee River Collective 1977), Buffalo Calf Road Woman (Agonito and Agonito 1981), and Hua Mulan (Dong 2011).¹³ In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa grounds her Chicana feminism in the histories of Chicana and Tejana resistance to white supremacist settler colonialism in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas where she was born and raised. She demonstrates the interconnectedness of Indigenous, Chicana, feminist, and queer movements for social justice and calls for coalition-building amongst them because they are struggling against the same interlocking oppressive systems. In their famous “Statement,” the Combahee River Collective articulate their vision for Black

¹³ It is worth noting that Harriet Tubman experienced Madness/disability due to “a traumatic head injury that would cause a lifetime of seizures, along with powerful visions and vivid dreams that she ascribed to God. She would rely on these visions first in planning her own escape from slavery and later, when leading others to freedom in the North” (PBS n.d.); and Charlotte Forten Grimké wrote about her experiences of deep sadness and loneliness (Oliver 1969).

feminist and Black liberation movements through the theorization of the overlapping and entwined oppression they experience as queer socialist Black women (1977)—an analytic framework for engaging the complexities of identity and positionality that Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw has theorized as “intersectionality” (Crenshaw 1989). In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, CRC member Audre Lorde critically interrogates the anti-Black racist structures and logics that produced Black/white segregation during her youth and sickened her with cancer caused by exposure to toxic levels of carbon tetrachloride in a factory where she worked almost exclusively with other Black people (1982). She writes of the ways that sanism/ableism, anti-Blackness, classism, white supremacy, and misogyny texture everyday life for Black girls and women, creating the conditions that bring the life of her closest friend Gennie to a premature end, when they are teenage girls; these intertwined forces extend across spacetime,¹⁴ producing continuous systemic racism that cannot be redressed by the rare instance of a killer cop going to prison.¹⁵ In her memoir *The Woman Warrior*, Chinese American feminist Maxine Hong Kingston theorizes the ways that the white supremacist heteropatriarchy in the US interacts with and at times amplifies the patriarchal attitudes of the American-born and immigrant Chinese community in which she grew up. As a feminist peace activist, she connects her critique of America’s state of perpetual war to systemic xenophobia, racism, orientalism, and imperialism. The

¹⁴ My use of spacetime is informed by Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ “palimpsestic practice,” which extends on M. Jacqui Alexander’s methodological use of “palimpsestic time to move out of the dominant imperialist mode of constructing a modern, relevant, and validated ‘here and now’ against an archaic, dehumanized, and unmournable ‘then and there’” (2014, 239).

¹⁵ Yesterday, on April 20th, 2021, the jury returned a verdict of “guilty on all counts” for the murderer Derek Chauvin, who killed Black community mentor, hip hop artist, and father George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

critiques of these entwined systems in *The Woman Warrior*, first published in 1976, remain searingly relevant. As I write this, Senator Mazie Hirono and Representative Grace Meng are leading a fight in the US Congress to pass the “Covid-19 Hate Crimes Act” in response to increased violence against Asian American communities since the start of the pandemic (Pramuk 2021). Even considering the underreporting of crime victimization by (especially first-generation) Asian communities, which Kingston also discusses in her memoir, and the negligence of settler agencies (e.g. the FBI, local police) in reporting hate crimes (Grover, Harper, and Langton 2020), instances of anti-Asian hate crimes increased by over 150% in 2020 (Yam 2021).

The pre-pandemic realities of “crip time” as theorized by Disability Studies scholars Alison Kafer and Ellen Samuels were multifaceted, including “something more beautiful and forgiving” than normative eurowestern time, such as slowing down and redefining standardized schedules in recognition of embodied difference, as well as “less appealing” aspects, such as losing time to pain and impairment (Samuels 2017; see also Kafer 2013). During this long pandemic year that has upended spacetime, such alter-realities have been realized by all kinds of people, including ableds, many of whom now prize working from home even as they struggle to create routines apart from but in obedience to white supremacist neoliberal capitalist expectations. For Mad, disabled, crip, neurodivergent, and chronically ill folks, the Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on our bodymindspirits, including our relationships and families, our livelihoods, and even our flexible, non-/anti-normative crip time approach to life. In pandemic crip time, the already truncated future assigned to disabled people by the hegemonic structures that govern the day-to-day and long-term has become even shorter

and closer. In the US, the pandemic has been most devastating for Black, Latinx, and Native communities, who have experienced mortality rates at 1.9, 2.3, and 2.4 times that of whites respectively (CDC 2021). The levels of anxiety, trauma, and grief that disabled communities, especially communities of color, are experiencing have created an ongoing sense of devastation, even as disabled activists and community builders enact countermeasures and continue the work of radical social transformation. For instance, the webinar “Disability Justice and COVID-19” was hosted by Disability Justice scholar-artist-activists Dustin P. Gibson, Dorian Taylor, Elandria Williams, Lateef Mcleod, Leroy Moore Jr, Cyree Jarelle Johnson, Talila A. Lewis, and the cross-disability abolitionist organization HEARD in May of 2020, less than two months after the US “locked down” (Gibson, et al. 2020). As discussed in this webinar, Black Disability Justice scholar-activist Lateef Mcleod compares the racist, neoliberal reaction to the “the dystopian reality we currently live in” (ibid, 17:02) called Covid-19 to a Disability Justice-led approach:

If you give a preliminary look at both of these subjects you would say that the two was pulling society in two opposite directions. There is covid-19, a ruthless and deadly pandemic, who is mercilessly killing our love ones, especially our disabled folks, poor, and black and brown people of color that in our communities. The virus is revealing how stark and harsh our hierarchies are in this society and the heartlessness in which our society deals with the most vulnerable in society. Then there is disability justice, which is a praxis that advocates for a community where those that the society marginalized are the center of our movements. Through the words of Alice Wong, disability justice professes that access is love and is advocating for a world in which everyone has what they need to live a sustainable and fulfilled life in a community that they choose. (ibid, 14:55)¹⁶

¹⁶ The transcript of Mcleod’s talk is available [here](#).

As Mcleod asserts, Covid-19 has both revealed and heightened socioeconomic disparities, as corporations and other capitalist wealth hoarders like amazon CEO Jeff Bezos continue to profit off the pandemic while poor, disabled, and queer/trans people (of color) are blamed for “failing” to survive. Disability Justice offers “opposite directions” to white supremacist sanist/ableist capitalist structures and logics, countering this ongoing violence. A Disability Justice response to Covid-19 advocates for daily practices (disabled activist Stacey Milbern making hand sanitizer in her kitchen) and long-term practices that value all bodyminds while recognizing and working to meet the diverse needs of disabled communities (Green 2020). Collectively, disabled people are figuring out what still works and what needs to be adapted yet again.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, I have been collaborating on the creation of an oral history collection as part of my work as an archival assistant to the Oregon State University Disability Archives (DisArchives). OSU Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC) interim director Natalia Fernández and I co-founded the DisArchives in Fall 2020. The idea for this project predates my time at OSU, and I was encouraged to pursue it by students, faculty, and staff from the OSU Disability Studies Network, SCARC, Disability Access Serves, and the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Queer Studies programs. The DisArchives are very much a work in progress; they are community-generated, meaning that the disabled communities these archives serve have direct say in their purpose, scope, and content. This aim is an ambitious one in that the processes for setting up broad and accessible

collaborations between diverse groups of disabled people are challenging on any given day—let alone during a global pandemic.

Part of this work includes reaching out to disabled communities connected to OSU and/or Corvallis, Oregon to figure out what the needs and desires of these communities are and how to collectively imagine ways to meet them. Having only been at it for nine months, I have already noticed a cyclical nature to this imagining that brings me back to my original assumptions, asks me to challenge and revise those assumptions when necessary. Cycling through my assumptions and perceptions in general is often catalyzed by conversations with others, and this has been no less true in the context of the DisArchives oral history collection. Challenging and revising my assumptions in this cyclical way requires listening and being receptive to the perspectives of disabled people who often have drastically different lived experiences, from which they draw different and even conflicting ideas. White supremacist settler colonial cisheteropatriarchy encourages each of us in different ways to be afraid of difference. Audre Lorde and other women of color feminists tell us that this is a divide-and-conquer strategy used to control multiply marginalized people (Lorde 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015 [1981]). For white settlers, practicing a fear of difference is a way to cling to power and to profit from interlocking systems of oppression. In her crucial essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” Lorde challenges this fear of difference and the ways it is used to bar possibilities of interdependency:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. *Difference must not merely be tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary*

polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (2007, 111, emphasis added)

This vision for engaging difference as a source of creativity that generates interdependency springs from Lorde's lived experience as a disabled Black lesbian mother whose understandings of disability and disablement cannot be separated from an analysis of systemic power and interlocking systems of oppression. Her work as a Black feminist scholar-activist and warrior-poet theorizes disability together with systemic oppression, as well as with radical possibilities for social transformation, including the possibilities for creativity and sustainability opened up by interdependency. Though not always named as "disability," Lorde's work engages with concepts of Madness/disability as expressions of difference which are an important part of that "fund of necessary polarities." As I demonstrate in my third chapter, Lorde's theorization of Black feminist frameworks shifts away from whitestream approaches to disability, necessitating the interrogation of moves toward humanization in Mad Studies and Disability Studies. Eurowestern whitestream humanist approaches (including many aspects of the social model) not only fail to account for ongoing histories of anti-Black racism, misogynoir, and white supremacist colonialism, they often continue their perpetuation.

Pathologization as a White Supremacist Settler Colonial Logic/Practice

The biologization, medicalization, psychiatrization, and pathologization of Blackness, Brownness, and Nativeness are settler colonial tactics wielded by the US settler state to subjugate, surveille, control, commodify, and eliminate people of color.

These tactics are undergirded by eurowestern white supremacist colonial logics which were (though not “beginning” with) being consolidated during the euro-Enlightenment period. Existing logics of eurowestern superiority mingled with justifications for enslaving African people and shipping them to new european colonies in the Americas, creating the conditions in which “black women’s bodies are always already colonized” (Hammonds 1994, 132). In conversation with Hortense Spillers and Toni Morrison, Black feminist Evelyn Hammonds discusses how the cohering image of “a pathologized black female ‘other’” within elite white supremacist colonial sciences in the 18th century was and continues to be used to justify racist and sexist violence against Black women (1994, 132). In addition to white supremacist binary gender and heteronormative sexuality, these violent logics are also bound up with eurowestern formulations of “Reason,” “ability,” and “sanity.” Writing together Hortense Spillers’ theorization of the slave ship with Michel Foucault’s “ship of fools,” La Marr Jurelle Bruce asserts that

the Middle Passage literally deranged millions of Africans across continents, oceans, centuries, and lifeworlds. I use “derange” also to signal that the Middle Passage, and the antiblack modernities it inaugurated, cast the African as categorically mad: wild, perverse, subrational, pathological, mentally unsound. By the height of the Euro-Enlightenment, preeminent philosophers like G. W. F. Hegel, David Hume, and Thomas Jefferson posited Africans as ontological foils for the modern, rational, European subject. Europeans repeatedly consolidated their identities as free and reasonable by casting the black-cum-mad as antithetical embodiment of unfreedom and unreason. (2017, 304)

In the same spacetimes as chattel slavery unfolded, so too did Manifest Destiny and the westward expansion of settler colonialism and its attendant genocidal strategies. Eurowestern framings of Native people as “primitive” and “savage” became justifications for the ongoing colonial theft of lands, as well as for displacing,

incarcerating, and killing Native people. Pemina Yellow Bird writes of the devastation wrought by ongoing settler colonial invasion of her people's homelands (the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nations). Settler-spread disease and colonial warfare were and are disabling, and as a result, "Native peoples are the intergenerational survivors of a holocaust, the continuing and ongoing effects of which we struggle with every day" (Yellow Bird n.d., 3). Yellow Bird shares the story of the Hiawatha Insane Asylum for Indians in Canton, South Dakota, which operated for 32 years and incarcerated over 350 Native people from dozens of Native nations.

In their crucial piece "Mad Futures: Affect/Theory/Violence," Tanja Aho, Liat Ben-Moshe, and Leon Hilton assert that psychiatric incarceration and the Prison Industrial Complex are grounded in the same logics and historical structures, necessitating Mad engagement with anti-carceral and prison abolitionist imaginaries and frameworks. They begin their article by recounting the police violence committed against behavioral therapist Charles Kinsey, a Black man who was attempting to bring Rios Soto, a Brown autistic man, back to "the group 'home' from which he had escaped" (2017, 291). The police shot Kinsey as he lay on the ground with his hands up, later claiming that they "mistook" him for the suspicious and possibly dangerous person about whom a passerby had dialed 911, claiming to have seen Soto holding a gun (it was actually a truck). Thankfully, both Kinsey and Soto survived the police encounter. Aho, Ben-Moshe, and Hilton argue that this encounter makes salient the historical entanglements of ableism, anti-Black racism, and criminality, wherein Kinsey and Soto were racialized—and thus pathologized and criminalized—in different ways that blurred the distinctions between white/sane/abled/rational/safe and

Black/insane/disabled/irrational/dangerous. Further, they historicize police violence in the context of white supremacist capitalist settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and anti-Indigenous genocide and their overlapping and continuing impacts—which are experienced disproportionately by disabled people of color—within the US settler state.

Questions of intensity and excess are at the heart of the interlinked processes of racialization and disablement, often produced through the interplay of rationality and affect. Police forces were established to protect owners at a time when black people were considered unruly property, when indigenous people and other people of color, women, and people with disabilities were construed as “irrational” others against which liberal personhood was constructed. (2017, 291)

The interplay of racialization, language, gender, and affect is a central theme of Asian American feminist Patti Duncan’s *Mad/crip of color* critique in “History of Dis/ease,” in which she stories Madness/disability relationally through “a process of critical remembering” (1998, 164). Duncan’s stories of memory, kinship, dis-ease, and silence are intimately entangled with the stories of her mother, a Korean immigrant who meets Duncan’s father, a white american soldier, during the US military occupation of Korea. Separated from her homeland, language, and traditional ways of life, Duncan’s mother struggles to assimilate to whitestream american life per her husband’s expectations; discouraged from speaking Korean in their household, she still raises her two daughters with knowledge of Korean foods, clothing, and other lifeways. When Duncan is only 12, her mother becomes chronically ill; Duncan finds herself acting as a translator and intermediary for her mother as they navigate doctor’s offices, pharmacies, and medical records, all of which are textured with xenomisia and anti-Asian racism. She describes feeling “doubled in years” from contending with the Medical Industrial

Complex and its agents—white doctors who refuse to listen to her mother’s English, who barely even glance at her mother, at all. Duncan stories these experiences and her mother’s illness through critical remembering, interweaving Korean immigrant memory with memories of medical appointments marked by xenomistic misogyny and white supremacy, her father’s stories of “rescuing” her mother following the Korean War, her experiences of attending speech therapy to assimilate to American English and being discouraged from speaking Korean even at home. These individual and familial memories are part of what Duncan articulates as “the historical nuances exemplified by generations of women in my family, and the Western myth that Asian women have an unbelievable ability to tolerate great amounts of pain—we are genetically predisposed to endure suffering” (1998, 163-164). Duncan’s Mad/crip of color framework shifts away from neoliberal definitions of resiliency as the ability to tolerate intolerable circumstances and toward a critical interrogation of those circumstances and the ongoing oppressive logics and structures which create them. I read Duncan’s assertion of “critical remembering” as a Mad/crip of color method and methodology which refutes the Eurowestern colonial dichotomous view of individual/collective memory. Critical remembering encourages me to approach genealogical reimagining as similarly relational in that my imaginary is being shifted and transformed simultaneous to researching, analyzing, and writing alternative origin stories.

“White [Mad/]Disability Studies”

According to some prominent white self-positioned Disability Studies scholars, the “first wave” of Disability Studies occurred in the 1990s in response to health sciences and other fields which studied disability through medical model frameworks

(Garland-Thomson 2013, 916). Similarly, Mad Studies has been called an emergent field and “a pioneering new development...[of] the 21st century” (Beresford 2016, 350; Gillis 2015). This colonial discourse (e.g. “pioneering”) tidies up the complex interactions of Mad/disabled activism with other “identity-based” activisms (such as Black and women’s liberation movements) into a linear narrative, which obscures not only how these movements inform each other and academia but also how many scholar-activists were working from their intersectionally-situated identities across movements to build “matrices” of alliance (Schweik 2016). The persistence of such tidy, linear narratives exemplifies the white supremacist settler colonial ideology that underlies whitestream Mad/Disability Studies, for which staking claims and establishing disciplinary boundaries is key to power and recognition. A white psychiatric survivor/academic is often credited with and takes credit for coining the name “Mad Studies” slightly over a decade ago (Ingram 2008; Reville 2013; Ingram 2016).¹⁷ Mad Studies’ “watershed” or “signature text” (again, according to white psychiatric survivors and Mad academics), *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies*, was published in 2013 and its contributions are largely (though not entirely) from white people (Beresford and Russo 2016, 270). Even though *Mad Matters*, itself,

¹⁷ It is worth noting that in May of 2018, an argument broke out on the Mad Studies Facebook group when one Mad Studies scholar-activist took another to task for making a flippant remark about Mad Studies being a “young” field. In particular, she expressed frustration at his suggestion that Mad Studies has existed for only a decade. Having read some of the context around these scholar-activists (both of whom are important to my work), I agree that his remark should have been nuanced, as he has done in other writings. I agree with the critique that white boys are not the Inventors of Everything (Including Mad Studies), and this is one impetus for my project. Perhaps the most crucial takeaway I had from the entire Facebook group exchange was the way mostly white academics rushed to the defense of a white man, attempting to shield him from what they apparently saw as the unwarranted wrath of an angry woman. Few people engaged with the source of her anger and the broader implications of claiming that Mad Studies was created by white men just over a decade ago.

asserts that Mad Studies “is far more a continuation than an entirely new trajectory of inquiry and practice” (LeFrançois, et al. 2013, 12), it tends to center whiteness and cite primarily white archives and whitestream history. According to these stories, Mad Studies is a “young” field, but already within it and Disability Studies, a canon is quickly being formed which gravitates around whiteness.

My purpose in recounting these stories is not to call out particular scholars or to suggest their work has not been important—without their work, not only would mine not exist but I might not be in a doctoral program at all. Rather, by challenging and shifting disciplinary origins, I aim to respond to the Sins Invalid Collective’s “10 Principles of Disability Justice,” which feature intersectionality and the leadership of the most impacted as their first two principles (2016). Extrapolating from women of color feminist critiques of academic and activist silos (e.g. Lorde says that “[w]e do not live single issue lives”), whitestream settler scholar-activists can and should continue to participate in Mad/Disability Studies; for me, the question is how to participate ethically in ways that build coalitions which(/while) center(ing) the leadership of the most impacted.

My approach to Mad/Disability Studies is therefore rooted in the stories of scholar-activists who chart the connections between disability, Madness, race, gender, sexuality, coloniality, and immigration. As I discuss below, such work demonstrates how the bounds of sanist normativity do not exist in isolation but are policed by white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, and colonialism, as well as how disability and Madness are co-constructed with race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class, and other aspects of identity and embodiment. Numerous scholar-activists have documented and

interrogated the “essential [whiteness] of the field of disability studies” that has resulted in the undertheorization of Madness/disability with race (Davis 2011, viii). Famous among these is HIV/AIDS and Black Disability Studies scholar-activist Christopher Bell, who “modestly proposed” to rename Disability Studies to White Disability Studies as a way to call out “the pretense that the field is an inclusive one when it is not,” particularly when whitestream Disability Studies has failed “to engage issues of race and ethnicity in a substantive capacity, thereby entrenching whiteness as its constitutive underpinning” (2006, 275).

In addition to Bell’s “modest proposal,” Petra Koppers, Anita Gonzalez, Carrie Sandahl, Tiye Giraud, and Aimee Meredith Cox (2008); Nirmala Erevelles (2011); Lousie Tam (2013); Colin King (2016); Angel Miles, Akemi Nishida, and Anjali Forber-Pratt (2017); Eli Clare (2015, 2017); Tanja Aho, Liat Ben-Moshe, and Leon Hilton (2017); and Therí A. Pickens (2019) have all expressly called out the whitestream nature of Mad Studies and Disability Studies.¹⁸ Their interventions, theories, and methodologies demonstrate how the bounds of sanist/ableist normativity do not exist in isolation but are policed by white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, and colonialism, as well as how disability and Madness are co-constructed with race, gender, sexuality, nationality, class, and other aspects of identity and embodiment.

¹⁸ Their work in pointing out the whiteness of Mad Studies and Disability Studies parallels the important scholar-activist interventions of the Harriet Tubman Collective, which has generated similar conversations for activist communities that have sidelined or forgotten about disabled people, including the Movement for Black Lives (2016). The scholarship-activism produced on both sides of this false binary of academia/activism helps draw our attention back to what the Sins Invalid Collective highlights as a key principle of Disability Justice: the leadership of those most impacted within a given community (2016, 16). Within both Mad/Disability Studies (which ‘forgets’ people of color) and activist work like the Movement for Black Lives (which ‘forgets’ disabled Black people), a turn to the leadership of those who are most impacted would require centering the experiences and following the leadership of Black, Brown, and Native (queer and trans) disabled people.

Further, they demand that Mad Studies and Disability Studies divest from and dismantle the material/ideological structures that perpetuate the whiteness of these fields.

Black feminist Disability Studies scholars Moya Bailey and Izetta Mobley forward a “Black feminist disability framework” to meaningfully engage with and theorize entanglements of race and disability (2019). They deploy this framework to theorize the conditions of anti-Blackness under white supremacist capitalist settler colonialism as crazy-making. Further, they argue that this framework “dislodges the white male body as the central normative body in Disability Studies, establishing the need to examine how bodies are raced and the ways in which this intersects with disability, disease, and bodily sovereignty” (Bailey and Mobley 2019, 27). Their approach to Black feminist disability frameworks incites me to center Black feminist experiences and theorizations of Madness/disability, including when “Madness/disability” are not explicitly named. This involves reading for the many ways Madness/disability and othered forms of bodymind difference appear recurrently in women of color feminist work and to understand such theorizations on their own terms; rather than theorizing them through Mad/Disability Studies, I work to transform my disciplined/disciplinary understandings about Mad/Disability Studies through women of color feminisms.

Following these interventions set in motion by Mad/disabled scholar-activists (of color, especially), I argue that the continued centering of whiteness and the perpetuation of (settler) colonial ideologies within Mad Studies and Disability Studies is in part the outcome of the stories told about where these fields come from. Therefore, my dissertation offers another origin story for Mad/Disability Studies that is rooted in

women of color feminisms. Different origin stories and “uncanons” not only enable us to reimagine the roots of Mad/Disability Studies but specifically reimagining those roots through women of color feminisms helps address gaps in analysis of race, colonialism, and white supremacy, as well as shifts the transformative possibilities of Mad/Disability Studies toward decoloniality and anti-racism (rather than the more narrow ambitions of whitestream Mad/Disability Studies to dismantle sanism/ableism, alone). My dissertation is indebted to women of color feminist scholarship-art-activism in myriad ways, not least for their explication of and resistance to interlocking systems of oppression. The analytic frameworks generated through women of color feminisms, Black Studies, Native Studies, decolonial studies, queer of color critiques, Mad/crip of color critiques, and transnational feminist disability studies inform my understanding of sanist/ableist oppression as intrinsically connected to all other interlocking systems of oppression.

Women of Color Feminisms and/as Genealogical Intervention¹⁹

My dissertation research seeks to build on the work of those in Mad/Disability Studies, as well as Mad/disabled scholar-activists in other fields, who make linkages between and/or claim women of color feminisms (e.g. Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde) as possible roots of Mad/Disability Studies. Mad/Black Studies scholar Therí A.

Pickens’ project in *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* includes Audre Lorde among those

¹⁹ While I understand that Michel Foucault traces the genealogy and “mutations” of the psy sciences (especially psychiatry and the psychoanalytic school of thought) (1978), I am not drawing primarily upon this body of work for my project here because other Mad/Disability Studies scholars are already doing the work of engaging Foucault’s work as/through a Mad Studies lens and I also notice that sometimes these projects as risking replicating whitestream tendencies of “the field,” such as by reifying Foucault as *the* genealogical root of Mad Studies.

whose work speaks to the “wide constellation of critical relationships between Blackness and disability” (2019, 10). In his chapter “Coming Out Crip: Malibu is Burning,” Robert McRuer hails Anzaldúa as a crip theorist (2006). Rosemarie Garland-Thompson brings together a feminist disability studies framework with Black women’s writings, including those of Audre Lorde (1997). Alison Kafer analyzes Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* as Disability Studies scholarship (2013). Piepzna-Samarasinha also invokes the names of Anzaldúa and Lorde as “sick and disabled ancestors” in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018, 12). I find myself in conversation with these invocations and I hope to build upon the work of these scholar-activists who remember Anzaldúa, Lorde, and other women of color feminists as theorists of disability and Madness.

In turning to Gloria Anzaldúa as an early theorist of disability, Suzanne Bost has argued that Anzaldúa’s work demonstrates the need for and opens pathways to recentering and reengaging spirituality and spiritually-based epistemologies in academic scholarship. Bost writes of the entanglement of her grandmother’s disability and her faith, “it became increasingly visible to me that pain and faith are both central to Anzaldúa’s mestiza feminist politics. Most critics have avoided these aspects of her work, likely for the same reasons that I looked away when my grandmother was simultaneously suffering and praying: fear of pain, fear of vulnerability, and fear of committing the intellectual sin of belief in the supernatural.” (2011, 192). As I expand upon in the next chapter, Bost’s argument resonates with women of color feminists who have theorized the ways their scholarly contributions are diminished by eurowestern academia for engaging the spiritual in a serious way, particularly by recognizing

spirituality as embodied practice—in this case, the ways that pain and prayer are connected make salient the connections between body/mind/spirit and spiritual activism. These connections further clarify the need for different origin stories within Mad/Disability Studies which honor spiritual activism as crucial threads in women of color feminist work. Such genealogical connections in turn move Mad/Disability Studies closer to a reconciliation of the splits between body/mind/spirit, the perpetuation of which these fields have participated in. Disabled Puerto Rican Jewish scholar-activist Aurora Levins Morales’ work begins from the understanding that the spiritual, intellectual, and material are interconnected and trying to understand one without the others is an incomplete description of reality. As the epigraph from Morales’ sermon “Tai: A Yom Kippur Sermon” discusses, radical futures and the imaginal should be “rooted in the reality of here and now” from which they arise (2017, np).

I join the aforementioned ongoing conversations and attempt to honor the work of those who have already made important interventions upon a prescribed whitestream canon of Mad/Disability Studies. This work must be ongoing, such that all Mad/Disability Studies scholars—not only those who are Black, Brown, and Native—engage genealogical interventions in order to shift disciplinary roots.

Mad/Crip of Color Critique

Mad/crip of color critique has been theorized by Jina B. Kim and Liat Ben-Moshe to name “an alliance” between “women-of-color / queer-of-color feminist and disability theorizing” (Kim 2017, np; see also Ben-Moshe 2020). The term “crip-of-color critique” was coined by Kim in her piece “Toward a Crip-of-Color Critique:

Thinking with Minich’s ‘Enabling Whom?’” in which she also credits abolitionist Liat Ben-Moshe with co-creating this conceptual framework around the same spacetime (2017). Turning to Audre Lorde’s poetry in *Burst of Light*, Kim frames her theorization of “crip-of-color critique” around Lorde’s articulation of a Black feminist disabled methodology. She asserts,

For Lorde, cancer is not an individual property limited to and contained by her body’s boundaries, but an extension of the state-sanctioned and extralegal systems that seek to delimit, contain, and exploit black life. This, to me, is a critical disability methodology: a mode of analysis that urges us to hold racism, illness, and disability together, to see them as antagonists in a shared struggle, and to generate a poetics of survival from that nexus. (2017, np)

In this view, Lorde’s poetics of survival imagine Mad/crip of color critique as simultaneously anti-racist and anti-sanist/ableist. Ben-Moshe roots her formulation of Mad/crip of color critique in response to radical coalition-building frameworks offered by Cathy Cohen, Dean Spade, and Roderick Ferguson, who “envision a queer politics through a coalitional lens that is related to one’s positionality in relation to power and not identification” (2020, 27). As I discuss in Chapter Three, the work of women of color feminists such as Audre Lorde anticipates the potential of this coalition lens, as well as what Alison Kafer calls a “political/relational” approach to disability, in that women of color feminists root their radical, resistant, and liberatory visions and practices for social justice in their lived experience of racism, sanism/ableism, misogyny, poverty, and anti-queerness *as relationally constructed and entangled*.

In their letters to Gloria Anzaldúa contained in the piece “Sweet Dark Places,” Aurora Levins Morales, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha articulate the connections between disability, racism, colonialism, and sanism/ableism

via their lived experienced as Mad/disabled queer people of color. They bear witness to ongoing histories in which whiteness polices the legibility of disabled bodyminds, even as violent racialization produces Madness/disability disproportionately among Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, and trans people of color. In her letter, Morales says that our bodymindspirits are maps we can follow to “the still and shattered place where transformation begins” (82-83). Without the transformative work of these scholar-activists, I would still be mired in whitestream Mad Studies and Disability Studies in problematic, unimaginative, and ungenerative ways. I hope to continue their work of re-storying these imagined disciplinary roots in ways that disrupt whitestream tendencies to ignore deep engagements with race and coloniality. Some years ago during the season of Samhain—when the veil between worlds is thin—my friend and co-conspirator Sasha Khan encouraged me to write a letter of my own to Gloria Anzaldúa.

Dear Gloria,

You were one of the ancestors that my QTPOC Arts and Activism class honored during last week’s Día de l@s Muert@s celebration. I painted a watercolor portrait of you to place on the ofrenda; I used as a photo reference that picture of you sitting at a patio table in front of your house in Santa Cruz. You are wearing a dark t-shirt with cactus on it and one dangly earring in your right ear. An agave plant is visible in the background. As in this image, you have the poise of a queer Mad crip mestiza badass.

I’ve been burning to tell you that Borderlands/La Frontera is the ground from which my study of Madness springs. I remember recognizing aspects of myself in what some might call the darkest parts of your book, where frightening creatures dwell,

where you stared deep into unblinking snake eyes as you tangled with the Shadow Beast. The way you describe it, these psychic and spiritual experiences did not happen “only in your head.” No, they permeated your body and influenced your appetite and sometimes even woke you in the night, or kept you awake. This was something I already knew, but you put into words: Mad experience is embodied and material. And the experience of physical disability and chronic illness is a psychic and spiritual experience, not just a material one, as Aurora Levins Morales points out. For Mad/crip people, the psychic and the spiritual materialize in myriad ways, including what Morales calls “night vision,” or the ways we can “move along pathways we can’t entirely see,” guided by the maps held in our bodymindspirits (2012, 81). As you point out, Mad(dened) and disabled women of color are most likely to develop and fine-tune la facultad (2012, 60).

I wonder, then, if Mad, crip, disabled, neuroqueer, and neurodivergent people, especially those at the intersections of marginalized race, class, language, gender, and sexuality, can collectively lead a movement of what you call spiritual activism, a fight to embody a healing of the schism created by Cartesian thought that ripped apart body, mind, and spirit, a schism spread far and wide through colonization? It’s a spiritual activism born of this struggle to heal, which is also deeply connected to the legacies of spiritual activism passed along through generations of Mad/disabled people of color.

Your friend and colleague AnaLouise Keating once said that your “spiritual activism enabled [you] to make meaning out of the apparently meaningless events of [your] life” (2008, 56). She’s probably not wrong, but I want to say that it’s not only been for you; you also help me make sense of apparently senseless, meaningless,

random aspects of life. Would I have continued on in school if I hadn't found your work, especially Borderlands? It seems unlikely. I was still functioning under the logic that my craziness is a despicable, humiliating, irrational thing, that my only hope of passing as normal enough would be to accept the dictate of the psy scientists that I medicate myself, especially if I wanted to stay in school. But your work confirms to me that we cannot medicate away desconocimientos; sometimes the Shadow Beast is going to push into our consciousness even if we up our dosage. The work of the inner world, as Keating understands you, cannot be separated from public acts in the world around us (2008). Or as you say it, "The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains...Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (1999, 87).

Gloria, sometimes this work of being a crazy person in an academy designed to weed us out feels impossible. This is never truer than when I feel the onset of deep crazy, or Deep Madness.²⁰ It's the place where my so-called invisible illness suddenly becomes very visible. It's also what you call the place of shattering, where light comes in and mingles with darkness, a place that I know from your art-scholarship can be a spacetime of transformation and healing. Even/especially engaging with Mad Studies and Disability Studies can necessitate healing.

Engaging with the stories of (especially racialized) Mad, crip, crazy, and disabled people and putting pieces together in collages that tell different stories from those of whitestream Mad Studies and Disability Studies is a helpful but often painful

²⁰ The first time I heard the words "deep crazy" put together was in a conversation with Maxwell Sajaad López in 2018. At the time, I understood this to refer in part to the potential for creativity that sometimes accompanies other embodied and psychospiritual phenomena during depressive or manic periods.

exercise as I try to get my heartmind around hugely complex and often terribly violent histories and ideas. These stories speak to each other, revealing so clearly the connections between pathologization and criminalization; standardized schooling, racialized disabled segregation, and normative assimilation (Erevelles 2014; Meiners 2007); “failure” to be productive and white supremacist capitalist alienation; slave catchers and cops (Kaba 2020); Black resistance, drapetomania, and the “protest psychosis” (Metzl 2009; Bruce 2021); racialized psychiatric incarceration and ongoing histories of genocidal settler colonialism (Yellow Bird n.d.). Sometimes just sitting with the stories is hard, induces desconocimientos in me.

I have this fear that by the time I’m able to unbreak my brain enough to engage in any productive, legible way with Mad Studies and Disability Studies, all the good stuff will already have been said, crip and Mad will have become just another affect that anyone and everyone takes on when they want to spice up their methodologies, and (lower case) critical mad studies will have morphed into some other emergent field entirely. It’s exhausting to even think about. Stopping thinking can’t be a Mad methodology in a domain that demands we publish at least once a year and present at a minimum of two conferences. High-achieving individuality is prized even in the most “radical” academic settings. At all levels of schooling, Mad/crip, queer and trans, and international students of color get left behind. Building cross-movement, cross-realm, and interdisciplinary communities in these conditions is more than challenging—it is an exhausting, uphill battle. This shit is crazy-making.

But I also know from you, Gloria, that sometimes those of us who have Mad/crip gain, who have night vision, are called through spiritual activism to move with those

who are afraid of the dark. I'm still trying to figure out what my roles and responsibilities are around this, and it helps that I'm not alone in the shifts. It will be together that we unleash the powers of our Deep Madness, even if we begin on our own by cultivating magical abilities, like dreaming, like night vision.

From the still and shattered place,

Lzz.

Chapter Two: Shifting Within “Estos Ensueños”: Mad Dream Reading and Gloria Anzaldúa’s Vision for Spiritual Activism

The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2012 [1987], 109)

A type of creative fantasy, ensueños are simply another reality. The reasoning mind’s reality is not higher than the imagination’s. I am interested in the place/space (nepantla) where realities interact and imaginative shifts happen. Some images stimulate changes; certain images change the images that live within a person’s psyche, altering the stories that live within rather than trying to “fix” the person that “houses” these images.²¹

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (2015, 35)

To the student looking at the intersections between disability studies & my work, no I don’t mind that you read me within a disability discourse. In fact I welcome it. Nor do I mind that you may refer to me as disabled.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009 [2004], 300)

A Dream (May 2020): I’m in a city, possibly one in California. I’m in a quiet neighborhood just wandering around; I’ve gotten separated from my friends. Although the other houses are very cookie-cutter, I come upon a very beautiful home that seems different from the rest. It has huge windows and instead of grass the yard is filled with

²¹ In this epigraph, we see an example of how Anzaldúa interweaves Spanish, Nahuatl, and English without always offering translation. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Spanish words are italicized (e.g. “On the gulf where I was raised, *en el Valle del Río Grande* in South Texas” [2012, 57]), but in later publications such as *Luz en lo Oscuro*, her use of Spanish and Nahuatl is not emphasized in this way and in fact is often not translated into English (e.g. “Al espíritu del árbol I pray for strength, energy, and clarity to fuel este trabajo artístico” [2015, 67]). In this chapter, I mirror this practice in Anzaldúa’s later works by including Spanish and Nahuatl without italicization; in places where I do not include translations—which are generally the same words for which she does not offer translations—I invite readers to research meanings/translations/interpretations, a practice from which I have benefited as I engage Anzaldúa’s work.

agave and yucca plants. Beside the sidewalk in front of the house is a small table with cups and tea bags on it. Next to the table is a kettle on a charcoal stove; hot briquettes glow inside. I am contemplating having some tea when I hear someone come up and ask if I need help. I turn to see who it is, and it is none other than Gloria Anzaldúa! This is her house, and she puts tea out for passersby. She takes the time to pour me a cup and then she says she is busy and has to go. I am so starstruck that I just say "thank you!" and watch her leave. I am left with the feeling that she already knows how important her work has been to me and that this is part of my "thank you."

I begin this chapter with a dream memory: a chance meeting with (my projection of) Chicana feminist scholar-artist-activist Gloria Anzaldúa, something that can no longer happen in the waking realm, as she became an ancestor in 2004. As a white settler disconnected from my own ancestors' traditions, I could never claim to know the ongoing significance of Anzaldúa's work to queer Brown women, Third World women, Chicana communities, and other communities claimed by Anzaldúa and which claim her. There are some stories that, though we may be privileged enough to hear them, white settlers can never hold as our own. In grappling with questions of what it means to be a good relative posed by Cherokee writer Daniel Heath Justice, I attempt to engage Anzaldúa as a Mad/disabled ancestor with the knowledge that her stories, theories, methods, and methodologies are not universally accessible to all Mad/disabled

people.²² That is, white settlers, including those of us who are Mad/disabled, must attend to her work with our responsibilities in mind.

Striving to understand and enact these responsibilities is an ongoing process for me, but a steady truth speaks itself each time I return to Anzaldúa's work: that each of us has a stake in and power to enact radical social transformation through the matter of our own lives and moreover that we have a responsibility to do so. Per her assertion that "[n]othing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" in the epigraph above, Anzaldúa's vision for transformation begins with "inner works" such as shifting the essential and subconscious images that guide us as a way to move into "public acts" (2002, 540).

Unlike eurowestern²³ (e.g. Jungian) psychology, which assumes universal categories for such "images," Anzaldúa roots her conceptualization of spiritual activism, psychic transformation, and images in her Indigenous, Chicana, and Tejana ancestral traditions. I do not interpret her theories to mean that any person may take up

²² As discussed in my introductory chapter, I turn to the four questions posed by Daniel Heath Justice in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (2018) to guide my reflection as I think through my roles and responsibilities as a Mad student, teacher, and colleague within the Mad Studies and Disability Studies communities. These four questions, after which the first four chapters of his book are titled, are: How do we learn to be human? How do we behave as good relatives? How do we become good ancestors? How do we learn to live together?

²³ By "eurowestern," I am referring to the cosmology of the imagined "West" that treats (per its own ideological constructions) western Europe and the US as the center of the world and of human history. eurowestern cosmology is premised on a distinction between the "human" (Man) and the "Other"; Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that while "[v]iews about the Other had already existed for centuries in Europe, [it was] during the Enlightenment [that] these views became more formalized through science, philosophy and imperialism, into explicit systems of classification and 'regimes of truth'" (2012, 33). As I am primarily focused on the context of the US, I will at times refer to "eurowestern white supremacist capitalist settler colonialism," which may seem redundant but is intended to call out the specificity of US settler colonization. "eurowestern" is my shorthand to refer to the intertwined and co-constituting ideological and institutional structures of the US settler state. Capitalism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism are intertwined and unfolding in many places in the world, but my shorthand here is limited to the US.

the images she describes as one's own, but rather I understand her spiritual activist framework as a guide for each of us to re-collect the images of our particular ancestral traditions with the collective goal of social transformation. To this end, Anzaldúa calls upon gringos to re-collect our/themselves (2012, 108);²⁴ the work of transformation (inner changes) discussed in the epigraph above is not required only of Chicax people or women of color but of all of us, though it manifests differently for each of these groups. Until white settlers engage in this work responsibly, we will perpetuate the inertia of systemic oppression and its attendant harm.

María Lugones informs my understanding of what it means to be responsible to this work when she writes that, while her "intimate relation" to Anzaldúa's work is a "coalitional journey," she is also "careful not to appropriate Anzaldúa's path" (2005, 86). Lugones' framing of responsible engagement as a "coalitional journey" clarifies for me that although our paths are different, I can and should respond to Anzaldúa's spiritual activist call. Anzaldúa explains that the path to social transformation (the path of *conocimientos*²⁵) will manifest differently for each of us but will bear some commonalities, including the common denominator of fear, which our individual and collective healing requires us to pass through and for which Anzaldúa offers us lessons. My work in feeling out the path of this journey is also shaped by Lugones' theorizations

²⁴ I want to add "our" here because I hear Anzaldúa addressing me as a white settler.

²⁵ As I discuss below, Anzaldúa envisions the path of *conocimientos* ("knowledge") as "[a] form of spiritual inquiry" which is "[s]keptical of reason and rationality" and elevates spiritual ways of knowing "to the same level occupied by science and rationality" (2015, 119). As a spiritual activist modality, *conocimiento* is also innately political, intentionally "shift[ing] away from knowledge contributing both to military and corporate technologies and to the colonization of our lives" and towards "the inner exploration of the meaning and purpose of life" (ibid). She writes of *conocimiento* as "[a] heightened consciousness," what "some call 'love' (which may be the same thing) [that] stirs the artist to take action, propels her toward the act of making. This *conocimiento* initiates the relationship between self-knowledge and creative work" (2015, 40).

in “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception,” in which she centers love as a critical lens for perceiving and engaging with others, especially those from whose marginalization we benefit. Lugones thinks through “loving perception” in the context of working to heal her relationship with her mother, explaining,

Loving my mother also required that I see with her eyes, that I go into my mother’s world, that I see both of us as we are constructed in her world. Only through this travelling to her ‘world’ could I identify with her because only then could I see at all how meaning could arise fully between us. We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So travelling to each other’s ‘worlds’ would enable us to *be* through *loving* each other. (1987, 8)

Lugones’ relationship with her mother is very different from the context of my engagement with Anzaldúa, and I hold these crucial differences in mind when I take cues from her framing of “‘world’-traveling” as a practice that requires love. Her examples of her own “world”-traveling are specific to her experiences as a woman of color, and I am continually grappling with how to engage in this journey from my positionality as a white settler, given the ways that white supremacist settler colonialism created and sustains oppressive logics and structures which Lugones says “ignore [women of color], ostracize us, render us invisible, stereotype us, leave us completely alone, interpret us as crazy” (1987, 7). As I discuss in my introductory chapter, I am also continually figuring out how to embody what my committee member Ron Mize describes as “coming from a loving, playful place,” playing but always “respecting the rules of the playground” into which Lugones and Anzaldúa invite each of us in our different positionalities. This requires me to constantly recenter questions about I am doing this project and for whom.

With these questions in mind, I engage Anzaldúa's work as a genealogical root of Mad Studies and Disability Studies by attending to selections from *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* that illuminate her theoretical and practical frameworks for understanding Madness/disability and their radical spiritual activist potential. By turning to Anzaldúa as a Mad ancestor of color, I demonstrate how her scholarship-activism fundamentally intervenes into the eurowestern colonial ideologies prevalent in whitestream Mad Studies and Disability Studies and enables us to reimagine the transformative potential of Madness/disability as the center from which anti-racist, decolonial scholarship-art-activism can begin. In particular, I show how Anzaldúa shifts understandings of bodymindspirit and in turn Mad Studies and Disability Studies away from eurowestern colonial cosmology and towards "a world in which many worlds will coexist" (Mignolo 2011, 21) through her work on dreams and dreaming. To clarify, my analysis of the significance of dreams and dreaming to Anzaldúa's approach to spiritual activism attends to the fact that Anzaldúa's work does not parse "spirit" from "matter" as eurowestern colonial worldview does²⁶ and my project follows her entwined theorizations of "spirit" with "matter," such that dreams matter both spiritually and materially. Ron Mize urges me to always bear in mind the ways that Anzaldúa's framework for spiritual activism is firmly rooted, in every sense of the word, in the soils of el Valle del Río Grande. Again, her theorization, development, and enactment of spiritual activism cannot be separated from

²⁶ Hence Anzaldúa's scare quotes around "real" world when she writes that "[n]othing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (2012, 109).

the ways her “images” are deeply rooted in Chicana cosmologies,²⁷ and so my aim is not to extend, assume, or appropriate the significance of Anzaldúa’s personal, culturally specific images²⁸ but to engage the broader lessons she offers about how and why shifting internal(ized) images *matters* to spiritual activism and social change. Further, I argue for elevating these broader lessons and more culturally specific theorizations on images, dreams, and spiritual activism within Mad/Disability Studies to center queer, trans, and women of color experiences and spiritual activist leadership, as well as to generate and expand scholarship, pedagogies, activist practice, and (institutional and individual) relationships that embody the radical activist impulse espoused by women of color feminisms.

As discussed in my introductory chapter, I write “body,” “mind,” and “spirit” together as “bodymindspirit” (sometimes abbreviated as “bodymind”) to acknowledge Anzaldúa’s assertion that “[s]pirit and mind, soul and body, are one, and together they perceive a reality greater than the vision experienced in the ordinary world” (2015, 24). Anzaldúa often writes about “bodymindspirit” in her discussion of wholeness, which departs from eurowestern notions of body/mind by asserting that these are integrated, interdependent elements—that people are already “whole” in the sense that bodymindspirit cannot be split but Cartesian duality violently obscures this, with

²⁷ In those places where Anzaldúa invites different groups to engage in spiritual activism, such as gringos, my practice should always reflect back on and seek to honor the intentions of her spiritual activist framework.

²⁸ Anzaldúa generously offers some of this analysis in her public work and points out when and how she intends different lessons for different groups of people—e.g. Chicana women, women of color, gringos. As Robin Wall Kimmerer stories, braiding sweetgrass requires tension and opens possibilities for reciprocity. In this project, I am feeling for the tension that is necessary for balance and creativity. That is, I seek to balance the tension between my responsibilities as a white settler and the invitation to play that Anzaldúa’s work extends to different groups at different points/thresholds. Figuring out when to move forward, pass through, stay put, or move back is part of my project.

violence increasing at the intersections of multiple marginalization. The process of coming into spiritual activist consciousness entails reckoning with this misperception to move towards wholeness. In Anzaldúa's vision for herself as a spiritual activist, this process entails a gathering together of the fragments of herself, mirroring Coyolxauhqui's regathering her severed parts. She names this the "Coyolxauhqui imperative":

I am often driven by the impulse to write something down, by the desire and urgency to communicate, to make meaning, to make sense of things, to create myself through this knowledge-- producing act. I call this impulse the "Coyolxauhqui imperative": a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us. (2015, 1-2)

From this desire to reconstruct self/soul, Anzaldúa writes to find and create healing practices, finding images, and shifting perception, as well as engages writing as method of healing, itself. Although she calls the enforced split of body/mind/spirit a form of violence, she does not reiterate eurowestern colonial narratives about healing as the restoration of a prior state, but rather healing is the effect of shifting perception. Anzaldúa's theorization of "bodymindspirit" has been taken up by Disability Studies scholars such as Margaret Price, Sami Schalk, and Eli Clare,²⁹ as well as Mad/crip of color theorists Aurora Levins Morales, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-

²⁹ See Price's "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain" (2015), Schalk's *Bodyminds Reimagined* (2018), and Clare's *Brilliant Imperfection* (2017).

Samarasinha in their piece “Sweet Dark Places: Letters to Gloria Anzaldúa on Disability, Creativity, and the Coatlicue State” (2012).

Gloria Anzaldúa as a Mad Ancestor of Color

Queer Chicana feminist Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa was born and raised in el Valle del Río Grande in South Texas to a family of ranchers and farmers with ancestral ties to Indigenous people and Spanish settlers. Growing up in the Valley, Anzaldúa experienced and witnessed intense racism, xenomisia, and nationalism from white Anglo settlers which in turn produced a suppression of Indigenous cultures and “excessive humility and self-effacement” among Chicanx communities (105). Generations of her family had experienced racist and colonial violence from first Spanish invaders and then white Texans, the US-Mexico border creating a wound from which springs “the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (2012, 25). In her critical book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, she theorizes this border culture through a framework of the borderlands, a liminal spacetime³⁰ within which its inhabitants grapple with difference and ambiguity; through their split awareness, nepantleras and other border-crossers develop “the ability to control perception” and even to create reality (2015, 28). Border-crossing and the “bridging and joining” of “the worlds of nature and spirit” is part of healing work and is essential to spiritual activism (ibid). She focuses closely on Chicanas, her knowledge

³⁰ The term “spacetime” was originally coined mathematician Herman Minkowski, who conceptualized it as the integration of the fourth dimension of time with three-dimensional space (Britannica 2021). This conceptualization does not treat “space” and “time” as discrete realities but as inextricably interactive and interwoven. For my purposes, “spacetime” is a helpful way of conceptualizing the inseparability of, as well as relationships between, land and place (space) and ongoing histories (time), as well as between different “realities.” This perspective helps me understand the ongoing material effects of how “the past is not yet over,” as Black feminist Saidiya Hartman asserts (2007, 18)

born from Chicana struggles against intolerance and their enactment of “mestiza consciousness,” created when, “[i]n attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts” (2012, 102). She also connects Chicana experiences with those of other marginalized people (los *atravesados*): “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal” (2012, 25). This is an example of a place in her early work where she makes the connections between different and overlapping marginalized communities explicit, including disabled communities. She envisions these “in-betweeners” as capable of the imaginative and creative bridging work necessary to bring about social transformation, linking Mad and disabled experience to spiritual activism.

Expanding our imaginaries is critical to our capacity for generating meaningful theory (awareness) that addresses the lived experiences of multiply marginalized people and intervenes upon differentials of power and the oppression that arises from them. Social transformation, according to Anzaldúa, is predicated upon inner struggle and change. Her vision for awareness-raising is simultaneously individual and collective. She sees the “maimed, mad, and sexually different” (2012, 25), “the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, [and] the foreign” (ibid, 60), and “the colored, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged” (1983, 196) as spiritual kin and cohabitants of what Anzaldúa calls El Mundo Zurdo (I return to this concept below).

Anzaldúa not only talks about disabled people as spiritual kin but she herself also experienced different forms of disability throughout her life. From childhood, she experienced an intersex condition which caused menstruation during infancy and in adulthood resulted in the need for a hysterectomy (McMaster 2005, 102). She had had four near-death experiences by the time she published *Borderlands*, which, along with other traumatic experiences (los arrebatamentos), reinforce her knowing that the bodymind cannot be split and provide access to other, suppressed ways of knowing (e.g. intuition) (2012, 57). She also struggled with diabetes, which caused “severe gastrointestinal reflux, charcoal foot, neuropathy, vision problems,...thyroid malfunction, and depression” and which eventually resulted in her death at the age of 61 (Keating 2015, xvi).

The fourth section of *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* several emails exchanged between AnaLouise Keating and Gloria Anzaldúa under the subheading “Disability & Identity” which offer some insight into Anzaldúa’s thinking around disability in relation to Disability Studies (2015). In the first email, Keating passes along questions from the students in her Anzaldúa seminar concerning Anzaldúa’s relationship to the identity terms and concepts of disability, which she paraphrases as, “Does Anzaldúa identify as disabled? why or why not?” and “if Anzaldúa doesn’t identify herself as disabled, what right do we have (a) to read her in the context of disability studies and/or (b) to call her ‘disabled’?” (2015, 298, emphasis original). Anzaldúa responds that she is “glad you’re reading me in the context of disability studies—I’m happy to be read in any of the

disciplinary studies” (2015, 299).³¹ As is characteristic of her scholarship-activism, she desires and invites engagement and expresses openness to creative dialogue. Continuing her response to the students’ questions, Anzaldúa writes:

Though I don’t identify myself as disabled or as a diabetic (preferring to say that I have disabilities & that I struggle with diabetes), you are free & have the right to identify me however you want...I don’t identify as disabled or as a diabetic for several reasons: 1) “disabled” would reduce me to an even more partial identity than chicana, feminist, queer, & any other genetic/cultural slices-of-the-pie terms do. & 2) Diabetic would make me a victim. But neither do I deny or reject the fact that I am disabled in some manner or that I suffer from diabetes & its complications. (2015 200-300)

Here her writing appears to reflect internalized sanist/ableist views of disability as a deficit or lack, which is why it can represent “an even more partial identity” than other aspects of embodiment or lived experience. Whereas Anzaldúa understands queerness and Chicana identity to be centers from which radical politics and bridge-work can begin, she does not here attribute a similar potentiality for extending identity politics to disability here. She seems to distance herself from disability and diabetes as categories of identity politics with her use of “person-first” language (“I have disabilities,” “I struggle with diabetes”)—although this would have been the politically correct terminology at the time she was writing—or at least she is not yet comfortable with owning the term disabled as a political identity.³² Even so, she clearly connects her

³¹ I find her description of Disability Studies as one of the “disciplinary studies” compelling for what it reveals about the territorialization of disability as an object of study. Descriptions of “the field” as a discipline rather than an interdiscipline may alarm those Disability Studies scholars who describe their work and the field itself as “interdisciplinary,” since “discipline” tacitly implies that processes of discipline-building—e.g. codification and canonization—are underway.

³² It is challenging to balance this distancing with her claiming of Madness in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which she integrates into her understanding of mestizas as “the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we’ve made some kind of evolutionary step forward” (2012).

embodied experiences to the psychic, spiritual, and material realities of her daily life, as becomes evident when she continues:

No, I don't feel distanced from my "disability." I feel an in-my-face, up-front-and-personal relationship with diabetes & its disabling complications. I can't escape it. I am concerned with my eyesight when I read, write, watch TV, or go to the movies. I have to pay attention to my blood sugar levels when I eat & exercise, when I stay up all night, when I socialize, & when I travel to do speaking engagements. The state of my feet is foremost in my thoughts at all times. When I forget some of these my body reminds me, sometimes painfully. (2015, 300)

On the surface of this letter, Anzaldúa appears to espouse some common sanist/ableist ideas about Madness/disability (e.g. disability identity as "partial" or lacking; disability as victimhood). However, based on her development of "theory in the flesh," I feel confident that she would have eventually "fleshed out" her theorizations around Madness/disability, including grappling with negative or deficit views of disability as an identity category. Aurora Levins Morales writes that there were reasons why this work and Anzaldúa's identifying as disabled were not yet possible in that time:

For you to shout out to the world, "Hey, not only am I a dark-skinned working class Tejana lesbian, but I'm disabled, too!" to draw attention to yet another way you were oppressed, and for this to do you good, you would have need a strong, vocal, politically sophisticated, disability justice movement led by queer working class women and transpeople of color who understood your life, and it wasn't there yet. You would have need people who saw that all ways our bodies are made wrong, held responsible for our own mistreatment, blamed for showing the impact of oppression, all the ways our nature is called defective, are connected, rooted in the same terrible notions about what is of value. (2012, 78-79).

Perhaps her condition that "if the center holds" alludes to possibilities of more desirable forms of Madness/disability.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha echoes this when they write that “queer women of color never say we are disabled if we have any choice about it. We do not want any more identities than we already have to wrestle with” (2012, 94).

Following Morales, Driskill, and Piepzna-Samarasinha, I read *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Anzaldúa’s contributions to *This Bridge Called My Back* as anticipating many of the frameworks of Disability Justice discussed in “Sweet Dark Places” (2012), and Anzaldúa’s later writings suggest that she continued moving deeper into her insights of the bodymind, pain, illness, and Madness/disability as entwined with other aspects of embodied experience and as paths to analyzing the workings of systemic oppression. Just as she forwarded ideas about queer, feminist, and Chicana identities as simultaneously embodied, felt, and political, I believe she would have continued to open up the radical potential of Madness/disability, grounded in lived experience of her bodymindspirit, that she starts to investigate in these earlier works and continues in *This Bridge We Call Home* and the writings featured in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*.

In a follow-up email, Anzaldúa continues to think through the question of disability as identity, suggesting that—like queer, Chicana, and other identity-based movements—disability movement may well fall into similar traps in which “[w]e are polarized between dominant, ‘normal’ groups who deny material inequalities based on identity/disability and those of us who support an oppositional form of identity politics. Both remain stuck in the limits of their identity groupings... The ‘disability’ movement, like other identity-based movements, may be effective for short-term political gains, but will it attain long-term visions of social justice?” (2009, 302). The Chicana feminist vision of the new mestiza she theorizes in *Borderlands/La Frontera* seems to have

transcended the simplistic view of identity politics she critiques here. Although the bodymindspirit and Madness/disability are in many ways integral to this vision, she does not yet extend this visionary transcendence to “disability as identity.” Perhaps this is partly owing to reasons about which Latinx Studies scholar Suzanne Bost writes in *Encarnación: Illness and Body Politics in Chicana Feminist Literature* (2010). Speculating on why Anzaldúa never identified as disabled, Bost suggests that one reason could have been the domination of Disability Studies at that time by hegemonic whitemain perspectives: “After surveying major texts in disability criticism, it might seem that disability is either ‘white’ or culturally neutral...The dominant culture poses its own understanding of disability as universal” (2010, 15-16). Perhaps Anzaldúa shared this perspective, seeing herself neither in Disability Studies nor in disability politics/movement. Nevertheless, through similar creative methods and modalities via which she theorizes the radical potential of “the new mestiza,” which is rooted in her lived experience as a queer Chicana woman, I believe Anzaldúa would have come to overlapping conclusions about the radical potential of Madness/disability, especially as theorized specifically through her experiences of queer Brown embodiment, as well as borderlands and Chicana feminist onto-epistemologies.

Disability Studies scholar Carrie McMaster theorizes Anzaldúa as “one of, or perhaps the, earliest social activist[s]” to include disabled people in “her dream of a just society” and to theorize queer disabled Chicana experience through her embodiment (2005, 105). In discussing Anzaldúa’s contributions to the theorization of disability, McMaster points to her writing about the shame surrounding her sense of embodiment and the ways she was made to feel “other” because of the entanglements of gendered,

racialized, and disabled difference. By refusing to separate the analysis of these embodied and experiential differences when reading Anzaldúa's work, McMasters writes that she hopes "readers will, as I have, come to appreciate how Anzaldúa's lifelong struggles with disability facilitated rather than interfered with her greatness of mind, heart, and soul" and that this appreciation "will lead to the further understanding that, as Gloria Anzaldúa made positive meaning out of her supposed 'incapacities,' so can other women" (2005, 102). These are important contributions that can help expand disability theory in the direction of feminisms of color. However, I argue that Anzaldúa's work pushes Mad Studies and Disability Studies far beyond projects of redeeming or making "positive meaning out of" disability; rather, Anzaldúa's theorizations about reality, change, and the bodymindspirit hold the power to shift the whole of Mad/Disability Studies understanding of what is presently called Madness/disability, including the theoretical frameworks, definitions, and methods used in these fields. For instance, Anzaldúa's work shifts the eurowestern concept of the body/mind split, necessitating a consideration of the ways that Madness/disability are not reduceable to either the body or the mind but are inextricably entangled—and further, per her argument that individual/collective is also a false dichotomy, that Madness/disability extends beyond the "individual" bodymind. Bost offers one such theorization of along these lines when she argues for that Disability Studies must engage the ways that Anzaldúa's "writings on pain and illness reveal an expansive body" that is rooted in Chicana cosmologies and further nuanced by her experience of fragmented embodiment (2010, 78). Bost asserts that a deeper understanding of Anzaldúa's work "must take seriously the perspective offered by pain and the avenues

of thought down which it led her. Her attitude toward pain...emerges from the Mexican cultural frameworks that underlie her writing and is directed toward particular Chicana and feminist political ends” (ibid). In this chapter, I also grapple with the imaginal, creative, and spiritual shifts necessitated by Anzaldúa’s arguments for dismantling eurowestern hegemonic cosmology and the radical potential of shifting Madness/disability that is opened up by her spiritual activist thought work.

For those invested in the logic of “born this way,” it is perhaps jarring to some that Anzaldúa says she “*made the choice to be queer*” (2012, 41, emphasis original). The lack of choice, the innateness of their homosexuality, is what lets many (especially white, christian) queers off the hook for “fixing” themselves: God/genes made me like this.³³ This makes me wonder how those who are invested in biomedical or genetic explanations of “mental illness” feel when Anzaldúa asserts, “I am mad / but I choose this madness” (2012, 219).³⁴ Her choice is bound up with her experiences of gendered and racialized oppression, as well as the stigma and shame surrounding her embodiment (e.g. her experiences of early menstruation and illness as a young girl). While she shies away from identifying as disabled, she directly claims madness, indicating that the ways she was made to feel “alien,” “not normal, that [she] was not like the others” (2012, 65)—though also producing shame—leads her to understand Madness as a political stance and a place of radical (re)imagining.

³³ See the article “Is there a 'gay gene'? The problem with studies connecting genetics and LGBTQ identity” for discussion of this concept (Signorile 2019).

³⁴ Beth Berila recounts one student’s interpretation that “Anzaldúa wouldn’t be lesbian if it weren’t trendy” (2005, 126); Berila nuances this perspective by “explor[ing] the possible rhetorical and political purposes of saying one ‘chooses’ to be queer in a world that would prefer queers to stay in the closet” (ibid). I interpret Anzaldúa claim to Madness as a similar political move in a world that prefers Mad people to stay closeted, or otherwise be targeted for sanist/ableist violence.

I locate examples of shifts in (Mad) consciousness in moments when Anzaldúa is talking about different / alter- / parallel realities; per the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, she does not privilege one reality over another, asserting that “[t]he reasoning mind’s reality is not higher than the imagination’s” (2015, 35). This position that there is more than one “real” reality is deemed irrational, incoherent, and insane within eurowestern colonial worldview, which desires to assimilate all realities into one capital-R “Reality,” or what colonial studies scholar Walter Mignolo refers to as “truth without parenthesis” (2011, 70). He asserts that this concept of “truth without parenthesis” has been used to violently marginalize, suppress, and eradicate “Other” worldviews, especially those from Indigenous cosmologies. Within the context of the white supremacist colonial academy—or rather on its “ruins of imperial knowledge” (Mignolo 2011, 11)—this notion of a singular “Reality” (and thus a singular “Truth”) is the very worldview Disability Studies scholar-activists must continuously push back against and ultimately dismantle if we hope to realize the radical potential of disability for social transformation. Anzaldúa theorizes alter-realities and different stories to the totalizing narratives and “Truth” of the eurowest by connecting with and nourishing her queer Indigenous Chicana roots. Her work points out that it is a colonial story that there is only one Reality, which eurowestern colonizers attempt to violently impose as the “Truth” for all people across all spacetime.

Anzaldúa’s storying against colonial narratives models the process of shifting in *Borderlands*. She explains that when Spanish colonizers arrived in what is presently called Mexico and Central America, their violent colonization included attempted eradication of Indigenous cosmologies and spiritualities through forced conversion to

Christianity, but their efforts failed; symbolized by Indigenous attributes embedded in la Virgen de Guadalupe, “[t]he Indian, despite extreme despair, suffering, and near genocide, has survived” (2012, 52). She describes a Chicana, as well as mestizo, practice of an Indigenous Catholicism in which “the old spirit entities” hide in plain sight “under the guise of Christian saints” (ibid, 53), subverting the colonial christian patriarchal order. Thus, her theorization of shifting and seeking different images from those violently imposed by eurowestern colonial “Truth” draws upon her community’s faith, which is “rooted in indigenous attributes, images, symbols, magic and myth” (ibid, 52). Her spirituality is a complex constellations of engagements between Indigenous cosmologies, including nagualismo, “[a] type of Mesoamerican magic supernaturalism,...a folk theory of knowledge” that prioritizes “shapeshifting (the ability to become an animal or thing) and traveling to other realities” (2015, 32), and mystical, cleromantic, and occult practices such as the I-ching and the tarot.

Drawing from many ways of knowing, Anzaldúa’s spirituality plays a key role in her ability to shift perception, upon which her visions of spiritual activism and social transformation is premised. Shifting is necessary for healing from soul loss (2015, 29), for breaking out of hegemonic eurowestern colonial “Truth,” for creating different realities. In her crucial essay “now let us shift...inner work, public acts” (first published in *This Bridge We Call Home* and reprinted in *Luz en lo Oscuro*), she charts her “nonlinear healing journey” through the seven stages of *conocimientos* in order to “transform [her] personal life into a narrative with mythological or archetypal threads” that provides insight into shifting for herself and her readers (quoted in Keating 2015, xxvii). She connects the healing of *conocimiento* to creativity and imagination: “A form

of spiritual inquiry, *conocimiento* is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity)” (2015, 119).

The path of *conocimientos* is intrinsic to her process of shifting, initiated through her embodied and “visual intuitive sense” which “reveals a discourse of signs, images, feelings, words that, once decoded, carry the power to startle you out of tunnel vision and habitual patterns of thought” (2015, 117). Shifting, in turn, is necessary for “transforming perceptions of reality, and thus the conditions of life” (*ibid*, emphasis added). While her discussion of “images” expands on the Jungian concept (2015, 35-36), she engages processes of receiving, locating, and interpreting images with her conceptualization and practice of shifting via the seven stages of *conocimientos*.³⁵ This decolonization reconnects “individual” spirit(uality) to that of the collective, clarifying the stakes of personal transformation for social transformation and exemplifying the path of *conocimientos* as spiritual activist work.

Understanding Anzaldúa as a Mad ancestor of color requires us to engage her work as a genealogical root of Mad Studies and Disability Studies. Aurora Levins Morales, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha turn to Anzaldúa as

³⁵ Although she sometimes refers to them by different terms, she describes the seven stages as 1) a fragmentation, rupture, or *arrebato*, something which shakes us out of “consensual reality” (such as an earthquake, which she herself survived); 2) *nepantla*, a “liminal, transitional space, suspended between shifts, [where] you’re two people, split between before and after” (2015, 122); 3) the Coatlicue state, or the “depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness” (*ibid*, 123); 4) “reconnect[ing] with spirit” as a way to face frightening or intolerable realities (*ibid*); 5) storying reality, that is, “sifting[ing], sort[ing], and symboliz[ing] your experiences” and “arrang[ing] them into a pattern and story that speak to your reality” (*ibid*); 6) “tak[ing] your story out into the world” in order to “[test] it,” and experiencing disappointment or devastation when “your edifice collapses” and creates an emotion blockage (*ibid*); and finally, 7) “the critical turning point of transformation”: shifting realities. This involves “develop[ing] an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others” and “find[ing] common ground by forming holistic alliances” (*ibid*).

a Mad ancestor of color in “Sweet Dark Places” (2012); their letters, written to her around the time of días de los muertos, warn against canonizing Anzaldúa, which Morales frames as readers’ misguided attempts to extrapolate meaning from Anzaldúa’s work to their own lives. These letters also deepen my understanding of how Anzaldúa’s theorization of the bodymindspirit expand the radical potential of Madness/disability, particularly in their writings about healing and dreaming. Piepzna-Samarasinha asserts that the abundance of dreamtime she experiences as a chronically ill disabled femme of color activist is necessary for dreaming and imagining radical possibilities for social transformation. I read this as an enactment of the search for and shifting of “the images in our heads” that Anzaldúa argues will in turn help us shift “the ‘real’ world” (2012, 109).

While some scholar-activists have already begun this genealogical investigation, more theoretical, methodological, and practical analysis is needed to deepen our understanding of the implications of Anzaldúa’s work for Mad/Disability Studies research, teaching, and activism. A particular area of neglect is Anzaldúa’s visions of “spiritual activism” and its power to transform the ways we think, create, and organize. In *This Bridge We Call Home*, AnaLouise Keating writes that Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of “spiritual activism begins with the personal yet moves outward, acknowledging our radical interconnectedness. This is spirituality for change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our

commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (2002, 18).³⁶

As discussed in my introductory chapter, I attend to Anzaldúa’s desire to shift as method and methodological anchor. Shifting is both a method and a methodology in that the will to shift anchors my methodological framing of genealogy-as-reimagining and shifting, itself, is a method for noticing, which allows other roots to become visible at the surface (2015, 159). She asserts that the capacity to “[perceive] something from two different angles,” creates and is created within nepantla, an in-between space from which one gains “the ability to control perception” (2015, 28).³⁷ Shifting and dwelling within liminality (for Anzaldúa, within nepantla) is thus a way to generate empathy and to move beyond the stuckness of a singular perspective. In keeping with the work of Black, Brown, and Indigenous scholar-activists in Mad/Disability Studies, rather than arguing for a “new” or singular origin story, I trace an alternative origin story for Mad/Disability Studies in the roots of women of color feminisms. Extending Sami Schalk’s exhortation to “allow” women of color feminisms “to transform the field[s]” of Mad Studies/Disability Studies (2018, 4), I ask what happens when we hold multiple origin stories in heartmind simultaneously and center the dreams, imaginaries, and

³⁶ AnaLouise Keating asserts that Anzaldúa used the term “spiritual activism” from at least the early 1990s (2002, 18). However, she also credits Ramona Ortega and Jacqui Alexander with naming and developing this concept (ibid).

³⁷ I acknowledge the necessity of challenging the formulation and use of “we,” particularly when “we” is used to subsume difference and recenter whiteness. Anzaldúa shows us how this word can be used to mark places of coalition, as well as places of cultural situatedness. At times she used at times “we” to mark specifically Tejana and women of color communities to which she belonged and at other times to call attention to various positionalities and embodiments connected to El Mundo Zurdo which she also shared, such as with queer, Mad, and disabled communities. Although I read Anzaldúa’s description of nepantla as one claimed by and specific to Chicana, Tejana, and women of color communities, I understand her call to spiritual activism as reaching out to all left-handed peoples.

practices of women of color feminists in Mad/Disability Studies scholarship-activism. To better understand the power of shifting as a method/ology, I return to the whitestream origin story of Mad/Disabilities that I interrogated in my introduction to unpack some of the ways that Anzaldúa's women of color feminist practice (e.g. spiritual activism) shifts (and dislodges, uproots, upends) the concepts of canon, objects of study, and disciplinary methods and methodologies.

Following Anzaldúa's stylistic choice to manifest her work in multiple genres and writerly voices on the page, this chapter crazes together different forms of writing in order to generate a more wholistic picture of Anzaldúa as a Mad ancestor and specifically her theoretical contributions on images and "reality," including dreams. As Anzaldúa modeled in *Borderlands*, *Luz en lo Oscuro* and much of her other work, shifting between genres (e.g. poetry to prose to academic writing) is a method which enables dialectical, overlapping, and parallel discussions that produce "double vision," a way of seeing overlapping and shared realities simultaneously (Wiederhold 2005, 110). As I discuss below, her method of shifting is an enactment of the two-way movement she describes taking place on a threshold between different realities.

The dream world is a shared reality, too. It is a liminal spacetime in which multiple realities can coexist. This opens opportunities for reunion with ancestors and other spirits. This is not just a spacetime for saying hi and catching up, but for sharing stories whose lessons must come to bear in our waking lives. The dream world reminds us that the separation of and supposed capital 'T' 'Truth' of Space and Time may feel very real while we're awake, but they fold and collapse into each other in dreams. A

consequence of this is that for those on this waking plane and those who have passed on, our realities affect one another's, and dreams offer us a way to have conversations about that.

Shifting Mad Studies and Disability Studies “Canon”

Even as Mad Studies and Disability Studies are discussed as relatively “new” fields,³⁸ the idea of a Mad/Disability Studies “canon” is already taking shape. Theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (herself a “household name” in DS) notes that Disability Studies is “an established academic field which includes a robust body of canonical critical texts” in her introduction to a special topics section in an issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly* (2012, np). Delving into the issue and based on recurrent citations across its articles, we can infer this “originary canon of critical disability studies” (ibid) includes such works as *Narrative Prosthesis* (Snyder and Mitchell 2000), *The Disability Studies Reader* (ed. Davis 2006), and the work of Garland-Thomson, herself, including *Freakery* (1996) and *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997).³⁹ Jasna Russo refers to *Mad Matters* as “the first publication worldwide to introduce the field of Mad Studies” (2013).

Lennard Davis describes Disability Studies as “both an academic field of inquiry and an area of political activity” (2006, xv). Mad Studies and Disability Studies both

³⁸ In his preface to the second edition of *The Disability Studies Reader*, Davis says that he “was announcing the appearance of a new field of study” in the introduction to the first edition (2006, xiii). For discussion of Mad Studies as “new” discipline, see David Reville’s “Is Mad Studies Emerging as a New Field of Inquiry?” in *Mad Matters* (2013).

³⁹ Along with Simi Linton and Robert McRuer, all of these writers are referenced as “pioneers” of disability studies in Leonard Cassuto’s piece “Review: Disability Studies 2.0,” with Davis and Garland-Thomson’s work referenced as “fundamental text[s]” of the field (2010). As discussed in my introductory chapter, the use of this “pioneering” language enacts the colonial impulse in eurowestern academic field building discussed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012).

arise from and in tandem with social justice movements—Mad Pride in the case of Mad Studies and disability rights movement in the case of Disability Studies (LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume 2013). While I want to trouble the notion of “canon” with regards to Mad/Disability Studies, I also want to honor the activist impulse that is innate to these fields and that persists despite the pretense toward depoliticization that pervades academia. In *The Reorder of Things*, queer of color critique and gender studies scholar Roderick Ferguson theorizes the ways that “networks of power have attempted to work through and with minority difference and culture, trying to redirect originally insurgent formations and deliver them to the normative ideals and protocols of state, capital, and academy” in the context of the US settler state (2012, 8). Specifically, he focuses on relations of power between the student movements of the fifties, sixties, and seventies and institutions of higher education to explicate the ability of systemic power to morph in response to demands for radical change. Facing organized student protests led by student activists of color, institutions of higher education reconfigured their expressions of power through rhetoric (e.g. rebranding themselves as “multicultural,” “diverse,” and “inclusive”) and the creation of cultural centers, Ethnic Studies departments, and other institutional entities that assimilated the differences around which radical movements organized. This phenomenon of institutional reconfiguring of power as a way to maintain the “order of things” under the guise of progressive liberal change is certainly not limited to the fields Ferguson discusses; just as Ethnic Studies, women’s studies, Asian American Studies, and Black Studies have continued to grapple with their relationships to institutional power on the one hand and the desire for radical social change on the other, so, too, must Mad Studies and Disability Studies address their

depoliticization and the cooptation of Mad and disabled movements. As part of this process, Mad/Disability Studies must address their ingrained white supremacist colonial tendencies, such as their pervasive whiteness and the overrepresentation and centering of eurowestern subjects, stories, and frameworks as “canon.” Mad/Disability Studies scholar-activists must therefore attend to Cherokee writer Thomas King’s provocation: “Want a different ethic? Tell a different story” (2003, 164).

Shifting our origin story of Mad/Disability Studies to women of color feminisms expands our imaginaries around what constitutes scholarship-activism and how it dovetails with spirituality. Moraga and Anzaldúa’s “theory in the flesh” is rooted in an understanding of the flesh as an aspect of bodymindspirit; the flesh (the material) is not separate from the spirit. To theorize from the flesh is inherently spiritual within this women of color feminist framework. Anzaldúa’s assertion that “the reasoning mind’s reality is not higher than the imagination’s” clarifies to me that the “realities” of bodymindspirit are constantly mutually informing one another, despite the eurowestern colonial impulse within academia to privilege “the reasoning mind” over spirit and the imaginal (2015, 35). Against this degradation of body and spirit, an Anzaldúan framework urges me to find the places inhabited by bodymindspirit where these different realities speak to each other and to understand how the transformative potential of the imaginal leads to socially transformative practices.

Spirituality is frequently obscured as a characteristic of scholarship-activism, thanks to the proclivity of whitestream academia and activist groups to despiritualize the spaces in which scholarship-activism is produced. In the academy, this in part arises from Enlightenment values and Cartesian duality in which whitestream academia is

grounded (Smith 2012, 128). While some Mad/Disability Studies scholars may imagine themselves to have greater investment in divesting from and dismantling harmful eurowestern colonial ideologies, these fields are not exempt from perpetuating such proclivities. Mad rhetorician Margaret Price critiques the pervasiveness of eurowestern thought constructs that falsely separate the mind and body, which produces a tendency to dematerialize “mental pain”—that is, pain in the “mind” is not felt in the “body” (2015). The continued investment in eurowestern colonial ideologies is perhaps unsurprising given the whiteness of Mad Studies and Disability Studies as critiqued by Black Disability Studies scholar Christopher Bell in his “modest proposal” (2006). As Bell points out, race (especially Blackness) continues to be treated as additive to the analysis of disability in whitestream Mad/Disability Studies, rather than integral to it. Instead, he insists upon a Mad/Disability Studies that centers “the intricate ways discourses of race and disability have been linked historically, and continue to interweave” (2010, 10).

Dreams and/as the Spiritual/Political

Recall a memorable dream that you’ve had. Perhaps it was a dream you had in your childhood, or maybe it was even a dream that manifested last night. What were the emotions, sensations, and affective textures of this dream? When you woke, did you notice the edges of the dream bleeding into the edges of your waking life? I encourage you to ask yourself, What political work did your dream do? Did it present a different reality, and thus perhaps a different way of thinking about waking collective reality? Did it prompt shifts in how you approach a problem in your waking life? Hold these questions and the memory of your dream in heartmind as we continue. That we are able

to remember our dreams suggests our visitation to and participation in other realms beyond the collective reality of our conscious selves. Dreams linger as memories in our wakefulness, evidence of the creative pursuits we are undertaking while unconscious.

The scholarship-activism of women of color helps frame my understanding of dreaming as a simultaneously spiritual and political phenomenon. Within the eurowestern whitestream imaginary and the secular-dominated space of academic feminism, dreams have historically been relegated to the garbage heap of spirituality. As AnaLouise Keating and M. Jacqui Alexander have noted, to speak of the spiritual in eurowestern academia is a quick way to be dismissed as irrational, and to that I will add “crazy” (Keating 2008; Alexander 2005). To illustrate the treatment of dreams as interesting but useless, deceptive, or unreliable as a source of learning or knowledge within eurowestern philosophical and academic tradition, I will briefly discuss a few foundational perspectives on dreams and dreaming from Aristotle, Sigmund Freud, and Rene Descartes.

One of the eurowestern canonical “greats,” Aristotle was one of the early philosophers who speculated on the nature of dreaming. In his essay “On Dreams,” written circa 350 BCE, he posits a physiological basis for dreams. According to him, dreaming is a phenomenon caused by impressions from “the faculty of sense-perception”—that is, our sensory organs and their corresponding sense (taste, smell, sight, touch, sound) are not completely inactive when we are asleep, and we continue to experience sensory impressions in the form of “presentations.” If Aristotle doubts the objective perception of the senses in waking life, he is even more so mistrustful of their

“movements” during sleep; dreams “perceived” out of movements of the sensory organs during sleep are simply illusions. However, he does suggest that dreams are useful for medical diagnosis during waking life in that the content of dreams can be affected by, for instance, our diet and environment and issues with these. Similarly, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud pointed to dreams as “the first link in a chain of abnormal psychic structures” and thus the significance of dream analysis for psychological diagnosis and therapy (1909, v). In his preface to the second edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud notes that, ten years after its original publication, most of his scholarly peers still refuse to take dreams seriously as an objective of philosophy and psychological science. However, like Aristotle, Freud imagines that dreaming has significance because it has utility for waking life—in this case, the analysis of dreams is useful for determining the cause of psychological problems. The mathematician Rene Descartes approaches dreams like a kind of thought experiment for skepticism of the senses (Windt 2019). That which we experience in dreams is not caused by “external objects” and is therefore not “real,” even if dreams trick our senses into believing that we are experiencing reality. For these eurowestern philosophers, dreams are part of a fantasy world created by the individual imagination and are therefore not “real” in a material or meaningful sense. According to them, at best, they can help us figure out what’s causing our indigestion; at worst, they deceive us into believing we are awake in “real life.” To all of them, Anzaldúa would likely say, Don’t be so literal! I explain why below.

Despite this long engagement with dreams in the eurowestern whitestream, these are often considered interesting but useless theory within the positivist and masculinist

notions of scientific objectivity. This arises partly from the fact that none of the above theories are able to produce “hard evidence” (e.g. non-anecdotal evidence) of the utility of dreaming for the dreamer (Walker 2017), and Descartes in fact warns us against relying on dreams as an arena for scientific research. Scientific disciplines today such as cognitive psychology and neuroscience attempt to describe the usefulness of dreams through the quantifiable benefits of dreaming for waking life. For instance, neuroscientists now understand dreams at least in part to be a way our unconscious bodyminds process emotional difficulties and trauma, which translates to less ‘dependence’ on psychiatric medication (ibid), and skills practiced during lucid dreaming are shown to improve in waking life (Schädlich, Erlacher, and Schredl 2016). In other words, the study of dreams is worthwhile because dreams are associated with supposed beneficial effects in our waking lives.

Women of color feminist scholar-activists like Anzaldúa, Alexander, Aurora Levins Morales, and Luisah Teish, however, inform us that spirituality is as a necessary component of analysis in critiquing Cartesian duality and other harmful eurowestern colonial constructs (Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa and Keating 2002; Teish 2002).⁴⁰ The very nature of the spiritual upends masculinist rationalist frameworks of reality, generating shifts in our perception and by extension collective reality. What the eurowest has forcibly separated out into “the spiritual” Anzaldúa sees as a primal truth of reality: the spirit, the soul, the body, and the mind might at times be helpfully envisioned for their unique contributing parts, but ultimately they are all aspects of the

⁴⁰ In *Medicine Stories*, Aurora Levins Morales writes: “[W]hat we need is the restoration of these profound sources of nourishment: connection with spirit, connection with the personal, and connection with the creative” (1998, 128).

same entity, entangled aspects of being(ness). She asserts that “[s]pirit and mind, soul and body, are one, and together they perceive a reality greater than the vision experienced in the ordinary world” (2015, 24). When we open up to this truth (such as through spiritual practices like meditating or conversing with plants), our perception also opens; it is from this place of “alter[ed] consciousness” or perception that we can be inspired and guided by different images than the ones fed to and imposed upon us by eurowestern colonial white supremacy (ibid).

Spirituality is also a healing balm for encounters with what Anzaldúa calls *desconocimientos*, or instances of frustration, betrayal, and powerlessness, as well as “the ignorance we cultivate to keep ourselves from knowledge so that we can remain unaccountable” (2015, 2). Ignorance is not only a problem of the “mind” or a failure of “knowing” but also of cutting oneself off from spirit and its attendant ways of perceiving, learning, and knowing. Reflecting on *desconocimientos* in the wake of the spiritual and emotional strife she experiences in the wake of 9/11, Anzaldúa writes, “Death and destruction do shock us out of our familiar daily rounds and force us to confront our *desconocimientos*, our *sombras*—the unacceptable attributes and unconscious forces that a person must wrestle with to achieve integration. They expose our innermost fears, forcing us to interrogate our souls” (2015, 16). Her framework for spiritual activism seeks a reintegration of *bodymindspirit* as part of the process of confronting “our *sombras*,” healing trauma, and moving through *desconocimientos*. From a spiritual activist perspective, spiritual beliefs and practices nourish and restore our *bodymindspirits* and fuel radical movements for social justice.

It may be relatively easy to recognize the spiritual import of dreams, but less so their political import. Dreaming can often seem intensely personal and individual; yet as we know from women of color feminisms, the personal is indeed political. Yoruba priestess and writer Luisah Teish says of her community, “[We] are political because we are spiritual” (2002, 507). From this perspective, dreams are not only a spiritual method but a political one. Through a framework of spiritual activism, I understand the self-transformation that occurs through dreaming is both a spiritual and political practice, as the effects of that transformation ripple outward even as we are brought into deeper connection and understanding of ourselves.

In the outer terrain of waking life, Anzaldúa called us to consider our responsibilities as spiritual activists; that is, through the work of self-transformation and inner shifts, we gain the wisdom, practice, and resilience necessary for social activism. Anzaldúa’s friend and colleague AnaLouise Keating interpreted this to mean that the work of our inner worlds cannot be separated from our public acts in collective reality. Keating asserts that Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of spiritual activism “embraces the apparent contradiction [of inner and outer worlds] and insists that the spiritual/material, inner/outer, individual/collective dimensions of life are parts of a larger whole, joined in a complex, interwoven pattern” (Keating 2008, 54). Below I consider dreaming as one such inner terrain where the sometimes unseen and unspoken labor of our struggles takes place. Following the women of color feminist assertion that self-transformation is not separable from social transformation and Anzaldúa’s provocation to inner struggle as spiritual activism, I argue that dreaming and sharing our dreams are methods that we as spiritual activists can use to “transform [ourselves] and [our] worlds” (ibid).

Dreaming and Images

In *Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa articulates dreaming (including daydreaming) as “creative process” which can help “heal or restructure the images/stories that shape a person’s consciousness” (2015, 35). She explains,

When you allow the images to speak to you through the first person rather than restricting these images to the third person (things of which you speak), a dialogue—rather than a monologue—occurs. Dreams, too, are a form of experience, a dimension in which life and mind seem to be embedded. Dream reality is a parallel continuum. While the shaman access this continuum with hallucinogens and other techniques, the rest of us access it through dreams. (ibid)

Shifting images and our interactions with them is not only an individual healing process but a collective one that can lead to social transformation. Through Anzaldúa’s framework, dreaming as spiritual activist practice enacts what she calls El Mundo Zurdo, the left-handed world, in which a multitude of oppressed people—women, poor people, queers, people of color, disabled people, “the people that don’t belong anywhere”—can feel at home and “forge a revolution” together (Anzaldúa and Moraga 2015, 196). At various places in her work, Anzaldúa offers clues about how different groups should enter into or engage with El Mundo Zurdo in different ways. For example, El Mundo Zurdo is both a destination and a pathway. Specifically, Anzaldúa describes it as “the path of a two-way movement—a going deep into the self and an

expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (2015, 208); she admits, though, that she is “confused as to how to accomplish this” (ibid).

In her art, Anzaldúa illustrates this two-way path between one reality (our shared waking reality) and another, the reality of el cenote, an “underground well of memories and shamanic images” which hold the power to guide those who enter it to new understandings of reality,

as well as new ways to actualize our understanding and generate different realities (ibid, 24). Anzaldúa imaged path between these two spaces of perception as passing over a threshold, through a crack/rajadura in “reality” (ibid, 99). There are multiple ways to engage the image of this path, threshold, and crack,

including as the one between places of what the eurowest calls dreaming and waking.

I interpret her image as an artistic enactment of

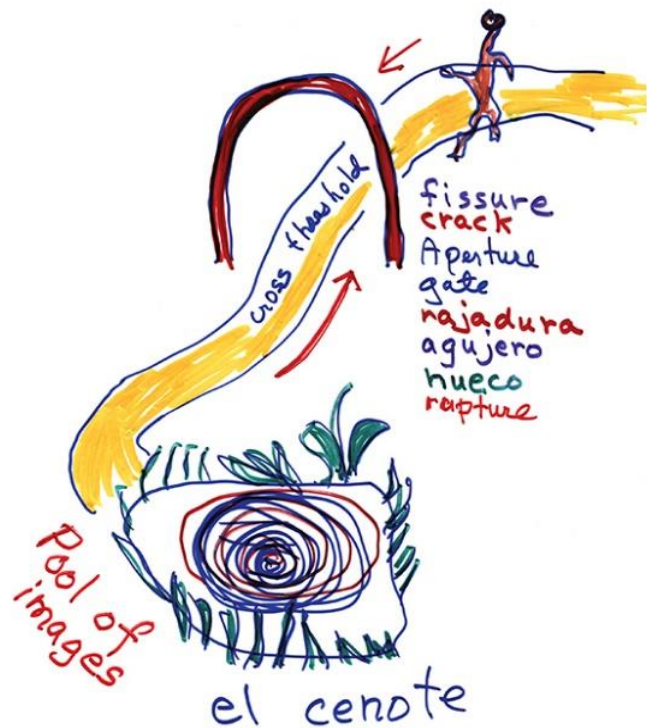


Figure 1. Anzaldúa’s “Pool of Images” Artwork

Image description: One of Gloria Anzaldúa’s artworks, this line drawing features a yellow road as if viewed from above. A person, colored red, appears to be walking on the road following a small red arrow towards a horse-shoe-shaped hoop, which arcs over the road. Below the hoop is text on the road reading “cross threshold.” The arrow seems to be directing the person to pass through the hoop and continue down the road to el cenote, the “pool of images,” which is represented as an organically shaped circle with blue and red concentric circles and spirals overlapping inside of it. The pool is lined by leafy green plants. There is also a red arrow swooping back toward the hoop from this side of the threshold. To the right of these drawings is a list of words in blue, red, and green, reading “fissure, crack, aperture, gate, rajadura, agujero, hueco, rupture.”

dreaming as a cracked methodology, by which she engages images that emerge from el cenote both in dreams and waking life, such that the separation of dream life and waking life is proven to be an example of what she calls “unnatural boundaries” (ibid, 23). The in-between space of falling through the crack (falling asleep) reveals the overlap in “dream” and “waking life”; this space is also what she calls a gate, which suggests a place that dreamers/people and other beings—“ancestors inhabiting other worlds” (ibid, 24)—pass through.

i dream i'm with my brother
 he is no longer in the
 realm of the so-called living

i've had many dreams like this but
 this is the first i tell to our older sister
 i rally my courage
 bring it up on the phone one afternoon
 we rarely talk about Mike in this way

after i share my dream, she surprises me
I saw Grandpa in my room right after he died,
before I even got the call that he had passed
 i see him standing at the edge of her bed, about to turn away
 just a quick goodbye
 she never told me this before

Anzaldúa's image guides me to a perception of dreaming as one spacetime (for her, one cenote) containing images from deep within our consciousness, the deepest part that is aware of our innate interconnectedness with all beings. When we allow ourselves to dive into esto hueco, we open ourselves to messages/images from other beings, including our ancestors. This perception induced by passing through the crack in the

artificial boundary between different dreams/wakings is a cracked methodology that we can engage to interpret and transform images from which we create shared reality.

Mad Dream Reading as Cracked Methodology

Passage through the crack between waking life and dream life and the liminal states in between is sometimes charged with fear and pain, such as when we have nightmares. The crack, itself, marks the place where our perception changes as we shift from one reality to another. Anzaldúa explains that cracks can manifest in waking life during traumatic events. In describing her reaction to the events of September 11, 2001, Anzaldúa writes,

A momentous event such as that of 9/11 es un arrebatamiento con la fuerza de una hacha. Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan would call such times the day the world stopped, but the world doesn't so much stop as it cracks. What cracked is our perception of the world, how we relate to it, how we engage with it. Afterward we view reality differently—we see through its rendijas (holes) to the illusion of consensual reality. The world as we know it “ends.” We experience a radical shift in perception, otra forma de ver. (2015, 16)

Anzaldúa's theorization on “the illusion of consensual reality” pushes back against eurowestern colonial psy science⁴¹ pathologization of different states of perception as always and only biologically-derived “mental illness.” Instead, she offers us a different aperture through which to understand the perception-state known as Madness, particularly when an individual experiences a cracking of perception. Whether this cracking occurs collectively or individually, we must contend with another

⁴¹ My understanding and use of “eurowestern colonial psy science” draw upon Mad/crip of color and Mad Studies scholarship which critiques the white supremacist (settler) colonial foundations upon which the psy sciences—a term coined by Foucault and which includes psychiatry, psychology, and their adjacent fields—are built. The psy sciences embody the nexus of racialized and gendered pathologization, eugenics, and medical surveillance (Mills and LeFrançois 2018, 504; see also Miller and Miller 2020).

way of perceiving. For Anzaldúa, though the experience that instigates such cracks may be traumatic, the process of attending to new ways of seeing/perceiving can have healing effects. Her healing process is facilitated by images from el cenote. She explains the power of such images:

Now I have a paradigm, a framework or scheme for understanding and explaining certain aspects of reality, and I'll organize my images, ideas, and knowledge via this mind map. Next I must think in images, hunt for symbols, and engage in conceptual interpretations of those images—that is, I must translate images as symbols for concepts and ideas. I must do it not by controlling the images as my conscious mind wants but by surrendering to them and letting them guide me. (2015, 25)

In this section, I “think in images, hunt for symbols” in Anzaldúa’s discussions of her own dreams and extend “conceptual interpretations” of those images by bridging them to other interpretations of those images (2015, 25). This method of extending interpretation and searching for patterns and resonances is part of what I call Mad dream reading. My conceptualization of Mad dream reading is rooted in my own dreaming practice and framed by Anzaldúa’s theoretical and practical frameworks for engaging images as part of spiritual activist growth; here I turn to references about Anzaldúa’s images in other feminist and queer of color writing, particularly those who engage dreams, magic, and spirituality. For instance, Anzaldúa’s recurring image of the snake as a symbol of sexuality and creativity appears in Muscogee Creek writer Craig Womack’s novel *Drowning in Fire*, in which snakes are associated specifically with Creek resistance and queer sexuality. During a scene in which Josh and Jimmy, two of the novel’s main characters, are finally able to actualize their sexual and romantic feelings for each other, they have a shared vision of real/imaginal snakes, seemingly

manifested by this release of queer Creek energy. To make salient the transformative and decolonial nature of Anzaldúa's images, I also juxtapose them with examples of attempts to colonize and degrade these images in eurowestern cosmology, such as the association of snakes with deception and the sinful nature of women in the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. Mad dream reading is not just a method for taking dreams seriously but for making connections between different dream traditions that are envisioned by Indigenous people and women of color as part of social transformation and collective healing.

Mad dream reading is a way of moving beyond eurowestern notions of dream analysis that affix dreams to individual dreamers, which ignores our "radical interrelatedness" (Keating 2015, xxxi). Rather, we can imagine our dreams in conversation with expansive and diverse networks of consciousness (dream and psychic realms, ancestors, and those in waking life). My imagining of these dream conversations takes a double form, as both conversants and chorus, speaking to each other but also together. I think and write the image of this conversation visually as two columns—one of Anzaldúa's dream images, one of engagements with references to these images in other feminist and queer of color writing—that can be read non-linearly; this method is an attempt to render visually and textually the "double vision" that can induce and occur during experiences of/with liminal spacetimes and alter-realities that can shift our perspective. By engaging these simultaneous discussion of dream images, readers are invited to daydream such images together with their own understandings of and relationships to them.

Here, “dream” has a more expansive meaning than the eurowestern assumption of a phenomenon that primarily occurs during REM sleep or as hypnagogic imagery that appears as we are becoming unconscious. According to Anzaldúa, dreams share certain qualities in common with trances and out-of-body and near-death experiences: they all are spacetimes which can facilitate a “widening [of] the psyche/body’s borders” (2002, 556). She expands our conceptualization of dream states through her discussion of “[d]ream reality [as] a parallel continuum” with waking life (2015, 35). Theorizing the forms and functions of dreams (sueños), daydreams (ensueños), and other states in this continuum, she asserts,

Estos ensueños serve a healing function. I use the word “ensueños” in several guises: as illusion and fantasy; as un sueño que se hace realidad, a dream that becomes a reality; as a way to bridge the reality of the dream with the reality of the non-dream; and as a type of lucid dreaming where one is in full awareness (or perhaps even control) of the dreaming process. In the vernacular, it’s a compliment to say, “Eres un ensueño, that is, una persona mágica.” “Es un ensueño” may be also said of viajes or lugares maraviosos. A type of creative fantasy, *ensueños are simply another reality*. The reasoning mind’s reality is not higher than the imagination’s. (2015, 35, emphasis added)

Understanding sueños y ensueños as overlapping realities with the “reality” of waking life, she engages dreams as liminal spacetimes that can occur in various states of “(un)consciousness.” She sometimes induces dream states in her waking life through sensory deprivation and meditation (2012, 92), sometimes even through “self-abuse” and “mind-enhancing drugs” (2002, 556; 2015, 35). Trauma (arreatamientos) and “near-insanity periods” can also passage us into this continuum (2015, 34-35). When first entering these liminal spacetimes, she says she thought she “was going crazy or...having hallucinations” (2012, 91). Her writing of these spacetimes and the images

that emerged from them are motifs that appear through her work. By engaging with them, we understand Anzaldúa's conceptualization of "going crazy" to include a range of what the Mentally Well might perceive as "positive" and "negative" experiences of double vision and interacting with parallel realities.

Cycling: Cracks, Mirrors, and Wheels / Mad Dream Reading I

Anzaldúa opens the fourth chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, "La herencia de Coatlicue: The Coatlicue State," with a poetic rendering of what I describe as a dream memory, or a memory of a supernatural or otherwise phenomenal experience that happened during an alter-reality state. Though dreams are usually associated with sleep, entrance into "parallel realities" happens during sleep-time sueños, wake-time ensueños, and modalities in between. As the chapter title suggests, perhaps this particular dream memory occurred during an experience with what she calls the "Coatlicue State." Perhaps it is one of the shamanic trance states she enters to experience "awakened dreams," or "the 'movies' with soundtracks" that impart words, images, and feelings which she interprets in order to "[reprogram] her consciousness" (2012, 92). Of these states, she writes, "My 'awakened dreams' are about shifts. Thought shifts, reality shifts, gender shifts: one person metamorphoses into another in a world where people fly through the air, heal from mortal wounds. I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world's soul, I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world. (ibid, emphasis original).

Her use of "shifting" here prompts a feeling-for the connections between different realities, including different racialized and gendered experiences of reality. That she recounts this particular dream memory as a poem suggests a wish for readers

to feel with her its fabric and texture, its cyclical and two-way movement; in part, this two-way movement is achieved by moving both inward (“burrowing deeper”) and outward (“heart offered up to the sun”) (ibid). In grappling with this cyclical movement, I repeat lines of the poem when it is necessary to follow multiple threads of meaning.

In this dream memory, she travels to a spacetime in which she is simultaneously and by turns in the chthonic underworld, at the peak of a temple, falling through the air, burrowing underground. The recounting is both cyclical and overlaps the images as if they are happening at the same time. In her dreambody (2011, 556), she experiences another manifestation of two-way movement: between el cenote— “the cavernous theater of dreams” (2015, 100)—and so-called “waking life.” To enter that theater, she lays in darkness, allowing her “protean” aspects to wander, her spirit moving inward while her senses stretch outward. “Sensory deprivation” is perhaps a misnomer; she is learning to sense differently, through spiritual organs that violent eurowestern colonial worldview has sought to repress and suppress.

“protean being / dark dumb windowless
 no moon glides / across the stone the
 night sky alone alone / no lights just
 mirrorwalls obsidian smoky in the /
 mirror she sees a woman with four heads
 the heads / turning round and round spokes
 of a wheel her neck / is an axle she stares at
 each face each wishes the / other not there

Obsidian (Itzli) acts as both scrying surface (“mirrorwalls” of smoke) and lubricant, facilitating her transformations as she confronts and moves between forms and spacetimes. The darkness of obsidian literally mirrors her nocturnal, cthonic selves, burrowed in, sensing, and hibernating.

She surfaces from the cthonic into a divine and fractured being of many identities; she confronts a many-faced Self, its four heads “each wish[ing] the other not there”; she, the “fifth” and separate head, is seeing and being seen by the parts of her she comes to realize she won’t disown.

Elsewhere in *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa writes, “We can no longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts. (2012, 110). She expands upon the work of mestiza consciousness in gathering up “the splintered and disowned parts of la gente mexicana” and making the value of all of these parts known (ibid, 110, emphasis original). While the word “pathological” generally carries a negative connotation, we can also read Anzaldúa’s use of this word as a recognition of those parts of Mexican and Chicana people that are downtrodden by sanist/ableist forces, their pathologizing power bound up with colonial white supremacy. Thus “pathological” is not necessarily functioning as a reclamation but rather as an acknowledgment of the presence of such oppressive forces that mark Chicana bodyminds as deviant and disordered. By reading “pathological” as a reference to Madness/disability, we can take Anzaldúa to mean that, like masculinity and queerness, Madness/disability is interwoven with Chicana experience, suggesting that the dismantling of sanist/ableist oppression must be included in Chicana movement.

“she sees a woman with four heads the
 heads / turning round and round spokes of
 a wheel her neck / is an axle she stares at
 each face each wishes the / other not there
 the obsidian knife in the air the / building
 so high should she jump would she feel /
 the breeze fanning her face tumbling
 down the steps / of the temple heart
 offered up to the sun wall / growing thin
 thinner she is eyeless a mole / burrowing
 deeper tunneling here tunneling there /
 tunneling through the air

Images flash:

Anzaldúa teaches Chela Sandoval to throw the I-
 Ching (*EntresMundos*, xv) the sticks bounce
 their motion signaling “the residue of energy from
 the turn” of the Wheel of Life and Death (the
 “process of becoming) which “gives rise to the
 succeeding turn” (Kapleau 1998, pg #) This
 Wheel turns in Daoism, Buddhism, traditions
 across Earth

In her wheel Anzaldúa turns facing up
 unmasking
 confronting her Selves “interfaces” (1990, xv)
 embracing “the vulnerable parts” cut off from
 each other turned against each other devalued
 by “colonizers depositing their perspective, their
 language, their values” (ibid, 143) that leave no
 room for difference

In her own Tarot Wheel she has “change[d her]
 terms of reference” (1990, 145)
 She reflects “crack[ing] the masks” scrying a
 whole “self” not separate from *los ostras*

In darkness, underground, Anzaldúa tunnels in her “dream body, a mole; the
 eyeless and alter-eyed nighttime creatures—moles, bats, salamanders—represent
 “protean being[s],” nascent spirit forms through which she senses the “inner watcher”
 that stimulates in her a desire to understand her “potential self” (2002, 556). In the
 transition between above and below ground, she glimpses another image, actualized as a
 photograph containing “a double image,” a material and spiritual being overlapping, “a
 ghost arm alongside the flesh one inside her” (ibid).

“in the photograph a double / image a ghost
 arm alongside the flesh one inside her / head
 the cracks ricocheting bisecting /
 crisscrossing

Arms reach out to embrace but they are not only
 for holding the spirit and the material self
 together The materiality of spacetime does not
 manifest identically for every bodymindspirit

An arm reaches across spacetime for Black descendants of stolen and enslaved Africans in *Kindred*. The arm belongs to a Black woman in 1976 LA who finds herself spontaneously sent through spacetime to the 1815 Maryland plantation where her Black ancestors are enslaved. She leaves her arm behind during her last journey home, arriving in the present of 1976 to feel “the strange throbbing. Of where [her] arm had been” (Butler 2003, 10). Black crip theorist Sami Schalk reads Dana’s severed arm “metaphorically and materially to demonstrate not only the connection between the past and present, but also the connections between disability and slavery, between ableism and racism” (2018, 48).

“she hears the rattlesnakes stirring in / a jar
 being fed with her flesh she listens to the /
 seam between dusk and dark they are talking
 she hears / their frozen thumpings the soul
 encased in black / obsidian smoking
 smoking she bends to catch a / feather of
 herself as she falls lost in the / silence of
 the empty air turning turning / at midnight

Obsidian mirror reflecting futures obsidian knife
 cutting away “the dominant culture’s fixed
 oppositions, the duality of superiority and
 inferiority, of subject and object” (ibid)

“After each of [her] four bouts with death,”
 Anzaldúa recalls, “[she’d] catch glimpses of [that]
 otherworld Serpent” (2012, 57)

Rattler-psychopomps the “otherworld Serpent”
 writhing at the threshold between realities
 embodying the passage between selves, worlds,
 memories

turning into a wild pig how to get back / all
 the feathers put them in the jar the rattling /
 full circle and back dark windowless no
 moon / glides across the night sky night sky
 night” (2012, 63-64)

“Sueño con serpientes,” The Imaginal/Material Serpent / Mad Dreaming Reading II

In *Luz en lo Oscuro*, Anzaldúa recollects an encounter with una víbora, “el nagual,” entering her house from its own just below hers (2015, 27). This is “the second time in ten years” that this particular snake has visited her (ibid). She recognizes snakes as her “guardian spirit[s]” (ibid), and both “dream” and “real” snakes appear to her throughout her life.

All my life I’ve encountered serpents—rattlesnakes slithering under the porch, egg-sucking black king snakes in the chicken coop, bull-whips streaking across the arid land, garden snakes sleeping en el jardín. Though snakes de carne y hueso, they activate imaginal, symbolic images in my mind. This confluence of physical and imaginal snakes becomes indistinguishable one from the other...Snakes may symbolize the life of the unconscious. (2015, 27-28)

By rooting herself in her Indigenous ancestral traditions, she reclaims la víbora from christian traditions that demonize serpents as both sin-in-the-flesh and treacherous beings seeking to lead people, especially women, astray. Anzaldúa asserts that “the serpent [is] the symbol of the [I]ndigenous religion” (2012, 51). For Nahua and Olmec people, the serpent is connected to womanhood; Anzaldúa extends this symbolic connection to “the dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life” (2012, 57).

“As I walk into my living room, a shadowy figure undulates across the carpet. My heart leaps. Es una víbora, a familiar thing, and my heart settles when I recognize it. I’ve encountered ‘real’ snakes countless times in my life, but this snake has entered my house—for the second time in ten years. This snake lives under my house; it came into my living room, up through a hole in the square of uncovered ground in the entryway where a large plant grows. On this night sueño con la víbora; an imaginal snake (as psychic inner figure), appears in one of my dreams, and two days later, as I’m walking across Lighthouse Field Park, another ‘real’ snake crosses my path. Whether material or imaginal, este animal symbolically represents transformation for me: encounters where nature—a bird, a tree, the wind—catches my attention and awakens me to another reality, a healing spirituality that

In Genesis 3, the serpent of Eden speaks as “he” Her feminine origins are betrayed even here the christian god links the fate of the snake to woman’s sexuality and childbearing cast out of the garden she is condemned to crawl on her belly to eat dust while the woman must suffer painful childbirth even Adam is punished for listening to his wife

You are Cihuacoatl, “Serpent Woman, ancient Aztec goddess of the earth, of war and birth, patron of midwives” (2012, 57)

You are ruled by Coatlicue, “creator goddess” and wearer of the “Serpent Skirt” (2012, 49)

You are the associate of Ala, Ibo goddess; when coiled, “especially when swallowing [your] tail,” you symbolize eternity (Ilogu 1974, 37)

You are “the dark sexual drive,” the sensual, “the serpentine movement of sexuality” (2012, 57) In *Drowning in Fire*, Jimmy and Josh manifest you from their queer Creek love: “[Jimmy] had turned his face away, staring at something across the room, creating a tension that made me look at the place he had fixed in his gaze. There were snakes everywhere, shimmering rainbows of color and motion, circles inside of circles” (Womack 2001, 200). Your circular serpentine movement energizes the lovers, anticipation and desire flowing between them as snakes of all kinds fill the room, their “colors blend[ing] together like a palette. The many colors increased their motion the way the colors of a kaleidoscope move in and out of each other when you turn it” (ibid). Through the aperture of the kaleidoscope, the lovers see each other, see a

calls for soul recovery. I hear the snake warn me, ‘You’re leaking energy, and parts of your spirit have gone missing. Get back the missing pieces of your soul.’ En estos Encuentros I feel that I’ve ‘met’ my guardian animal, my daimon, known as ‘el nagual’ in Toltec spiritual traditions.” (2015, 27)

different reality where their embrace is at last possible, after so many years of waiting and wanting, the circles of their life paths bringing them back to each other and this moment. Like the snakes, they make this possibility into reality. Afterward, you disappear, and Josh “trac[es] circles on [Jimmy’s] skin” (ibid, 201).

Anzaldúa understands the snake as la Víbora, “Snake Woman,” yet the knowledge of the Snake Woman is also “older than gender” (2012, 48). La Víbora’s visitations throughout Anzaldúa’s life (especially her adolescence and young adulthood) facilitate her entrance into the knowledge of her body, “that [she is] a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul” (ibid). “Whether material or imaginal,” she says, snakes “represent transformation” (2015, 27). In Womack’s novel, snakes take on many roles that parallel their references in Creek cosmology (Gamber 2009). Although in the scene above snakes appear as creative and sexual companions, even protectors (“[a] whip snake was writhing up Jimmy’s lamp stand, a sentry going up to this lookout” [Womack 2005, 200]), elsewhere their presence is more threatening. As a boy, Josh’s grandfather warns him about “something in the water,” a monster called the tie-snake, which has “horns like a deer and all kinds of colors” (2001, 19). Literary scholar John Gamber writes that “Tie Snake is a figure associated with the World Below, a creature that moves between that world and this one” (2009, 110). Not long after he learns of the tie-snake, Josh nearly dies during a swimming accident when he gets tangled up in discarded fishing line beneath a floating dock in a lake. As he is drowning,

the lines transform into snakes that hold him down. He loses consciousness, thinking “[h]e had gone off to the underwater world, but he couldn’t get back to his” (2001, 22). The last thing Josh detects before falling unconscious is Jimmy diving in to save him, but instead of a boy, Josh sees “a snake, with horns, swimming toward him...The giant snake was trying to wrap itself around Josh, and he was too weak to stop it” (ibid).

The physical presence of the serpent who induces transformation also represents the overlap of the material and the psychic realms (the “ghost arm alongside the flesh one”); for Anzaldúa, snakes are a manifestation of and path to entering this knowledge. When she meets serpents, she experiences “a deep stillness” (2015, 27), a shared dreaming during which they “activate imaginal, symbolic images in [her] mind” (ibid). She calls this experience “enter[ing] into the serpent” (2012, 48), through which her daimon (la víbora) helps her recover parts of herself that have gone missing (2015, 28).

Dreaming with Anzaldúa in the Classroom

As demonstrated above, dreams and dreaming are essential to Anzaldúa’s healing and imaginative processes as she develops her vision for spiritual activism. In this section, I examine the theoretical and practical implications of Anzaldúa’s concept of spiritual activism for dreams and dreaming as part of Mad Studies and Disability Studies pedagogy. Following her engagement with various dream states and practices as fundamental to “inner change” and, in turn, “outer acts,” I discuss the pedagogical import of dreams for actualizing this two-way movement (inward/outward).

As previously discussed, Anzaldúa describes this two-way movement as both “a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world” through which the spiritual activist manifests personal and social transformation (2015, 208). In waking

life, it can be hard for many of us to conceptualize this simultaneity of movement that Anzaldúa articulates, especially when we are actively immersed in the eurowestern colonial setting of the academy, which forces a separation between the spiritual and the material. In our dreamscapes, however, we are able to hold the images of that which to our waking bodyminds is otherwise confounding phenomena. That which is irrational and impossible to our waking selves becomes conceivable and even revelatory to our dreaming selves. This is another aspect of what makes dreaming a cracked method, a Mad method of spiritual activism: entering into dreams generatively crazes our perception of “reality,” causing us to question what is “real” and to acknowledge the possibility of other realities. Taken further, crazing/cracking perception can guide us to imagine different realities even when we have returned to the “consensual reality” of waking life. The suspension of disbelief that is organic and innate to the dream realm makes it a Mad place. And perhaps being Mad makes it easier to carry the lessons and moods and atmospheres of the dream world over into waking life. Whether or not we are Mad in waking life, maybe we are all a bit Mad in dream life.

To those who relegate dreams to the realm of fantasy or imagination and refute their import for waking life, Anzaldúa says, Don’t be so literal! She asserts that what we call “imagination” is not “a marginal reality...[or] altered state but, rather...another type of reality” (2015, 37). Imagination, dreams, and altered states all carry the potential for healing and inner change. She explains,

Judging stories of nonliteral realities, such as chamanas’ flights to other worlds, as “made up,” our western society invalidates the meanings and healing they offer. Are dreams real? Do they represent a separate reality? Do we make dreams, or does something outside us originate and orchestrate them? Is imagination’s nonordinary reality real? Does it matter whether the journey

comes from a waking dream, the unconscious in symbolic representation, or a nonordinary parallel world? Who cares, as long as the information (whether metaphorical or literal) gained from a shamanic journey makes positive changes in a person's life. We must avoid the snares of literalism. (ibid)

In our dreams, we become more sensitive and open to possibility; we can hold apparently contradictory notions at the same time. We can fly, we can move through solid objects, we can breathe underwater. While all of this makes dreaming very fun—and as we know from adrienne maree brown, (spiritual) activism should be fun (brown 2019)—it may be challenging to envision how this makes dreaming part of a spiritual activist practice. To begin with, dreaming can provide us practice with intentionality. Intention-setting is an important aspect of many dreaming practices, including lucid dreaming. Dreamers who wish to experience lucid dreaming more often practice intention-setting in the waking world. Making spacetime for intention-setting before sleeping is, like prayer and meditation, an important form of self-love.

Lucid dreaming, whether practiced or accidental, is also the perfect practice setting for building intentionality, as what our dream selves imagine manifests instantaneously. Have you ever had a dream in which you felt fearful that something sinister was about to appear, only to turn a corner and encounter something or someone you fear in waking life? When it occurs spontaneously in this way, this phenomenon can be terrifying, but it points to the ways that we can harness the power of dreaming for more intentional kinds of practice. At times I have become lucid in the midst of nightmares and harnessed that power to instantaneously actualize a new dream.

This ability to dissolve nightmares has prompted me to pursue lucid dreaming practice in a more intentional way, and although I do not lucid dream with the

frequency to which I aspire, the waking life practices I have developed to support lucid dreaming have had generative effects throughout my life. Dream journaling keeps me more accountable to journaling also about my waking life. When I record dreams that have friends, family, and acquaintances in them, I find that I am more likely to reach out to them in waking life and see how they are doing. Meditating before sleep has been as useful for the ruminating on and reducing the stresses of my waking life as it has been for improving my ability to lucid dream. Making time to meditate before dreaming forces me to reserve spacetime for my bodymindspirit that I often otherwise neglect. I use this spacetime to set intentions for my dream self. Through discussions with queer anarchist scholar-activist Andrea Haverkamp, I have come to realize that intention-setting before dreaming is a form of prefigurative work that anticipates the intense magic of the dreamspace and that the ways we engage that magic while dreaming is a form of prefigurative work for waking life. This creates an awareness of the way we are moving between worlds when we shift from the shared reality of waking life to that of the dream realm.

As a teacher, I see the relevance of spiritual activist principles broadly, and dream-based methods and methodologies specifically, to learning processes. I teach courses in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Queer Studies; our courses discuss wide-ranging topics related to race, gender, sexuality, identity, embodiment, and history. Our collective learning spaces in these classes can be very vulnerable-making, as we engage with materials and each other's stories that are frequently centered on challenging subjects, including violence and trauma. If not approached with care, and frankly, love, these classes can easily become (re)traumatizing spaces.

The intensity of the subjects that arise in the classes I teach—gendered and racialized trauma, transness, sanism/ableism, sexual violence, racial violence—has required me to bring a more intentional spiritual activist ethos to my teaching. Rather than relying on the pace of the quarter and the forced intimacy of a small class to produce a sense of safety and willingness to be vulnerable with each other, in a recent course I tried to extend relationship- and trust-building practice through homework assignments that ensure these processes are not limited only to the spacetime of our in-person or synchronous class gatherings. Because my own magical practices are heavily rooted in dreams and dreaming, I chose to incorporate opportunities for discussion of dreams and dreaming into our coursework through a daily journaling assignment premised on “Basic Quick Diary Format” introduced by artist-scholar Lynda Barry in her book *Syllabus* (2014, 63). Though students were not required to journal about their dreams every day, nor were they required to divulge the intense details of their dreams and waking life occurrences to me as a grader, most of them choose to do so. A few interesting if unsurprising patterns that emerged through this assignment are that those who record their dreams diligently tend to dream more vividly and remember more details when they wake up, and for those who were already vivid dreamers, they reported having lucid dreams more often. A few students even mentioned dreaming about our peers from class or about our course topics! One effect of this assignment was that the students who engaged the daily journal practice seriously tended to speak up more in class; those students also seemed more willing to come to me when they were having issues outside of school that were impacting their work. An unanticipated outcome of this journaling assignment was that for a few students who were struggling

and did not often come to class but still turned in their journals, I was able to maintain a connection with them that slowly built trust over the long term.

Engaging in conversations about dreams is a spiritual activist method we can use in learning settings. While the content of our dreams is often a significant part of these conversations, it's important to recognize the conversations, themselves, as significant to spiritual activism. Dialoguing about dreams moves us into a spacetime in waking life in which we are more willing to hear each other and believe each other. This is a useful strategy of validation especially for those of us who have been constantly disbelieved, called crazy. I reckon this is because dreams are omniversal and even for those who do not lend the content of dreams any credit in waking life, the very fact of our dreaming opens spacetime for listening and suspending disbelief.

Whether or not we recollect our dreams, we can engage waking life practices like dialoguing and intention-setting in order to make the presence of spirit more salient in our day-to-day lives. Maybe your magical practice is not rooted in dreams but in other sources of knowledge, nourishment, and power; engaging with your dreams and with the dreams of others can open pathways to locate and enhance your rootedness in those sources, as well as to encourage and support your practice as a spiritual activist.

Conclusion

I understand Anzaldúa's conceptualization of spiritual activism as a Mad/crip Chicana framework that she offers to all who dwell in the Left-Handed World as a way to build relational solidarities and radical coalitions. That is, spiritual activism as an Anzaldúan analytic must address the ways racialized, gendered, linguistic, and material borders are used as tools of white supremacist colonial oppression. Reading Anzaldúa's

work together with Black feminist, Asian American feminist, and other women of color feminist work necessitates centering anti-racist methods and methodologies in all spiritual activist practice.

In this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications of Gloria Anzaldúa's work for Mad Studies and Disability Studies. In particular, her framework for spiritual activism can actualize a shift away from racist and sanist/ableist approaches to spirituality, embodiment, and rationality (e.g. the Cartesian body/mind split) and towards scholar-activist work that reintegrates spirit/soul-work and prioritizes healing bodymindspirits. I see a spiritual activist turn as one beginning for more seriously contending with ongoing harm and trauma induced by eurowestern colonial academia, which disproportionately impacts students, staff, and faculty of color. Turning to Anzaldúa as a Mad/disabled ancestor of color is part of a larger shift that is overdue in Mad Studies and Disability Studies, in which the scholarship-art-activism of women of color feminists is not simply acknowledged and included in these fields but is allowed to entirely transform Mad/Disability Studies. Such transformation must include meaningful, material change in academia as an in-the-meantime strategy—for instance, creating faculty positions specifically for women, trans, and nonbinary people of color within fields examining the intersections of embodied difference, including Mad/Disability Studies, WGSS, Queer Studies, and Ethnic Studies; graduating Black undergraduate and graduate students; and retaining and supporting Black faculty.⁴²

⁴² By in-the-meantime strategy, I mean between the “now” of this shared spacetime and—to riff on José Esteban Muñoz's imagined futurities in *Cruising Utopia*—the queer and Mad/crip utopic horizons for which radical activists are striving (2009).

Chapter Three: Mad Black Poetics in Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

Content Notes: This chapter includes discussions of anti-Black racism and sanist/ableist discrimination and violence, as well as discussions of suicide and suicidality.

I lost my sister, Gennie, to my silence and her pain and despair, to both our angers and to a world's cruelty that destroys its own young in passing...I have never been able to blind myself to that cruelty.

—Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982, 251-252)

It was in high school that I came to believe that I was different from my white classmates, not because I was Black, but because I was me.

—Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982, 82)

In *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde*, Alexis De Veaux stories Black lesbian mother warrior poet Audre Lorde's historic address at the first National Third World Gay and Lesbian Conference in 1979 (2004). Like most of her works, Lorde's keynote makes salient the inextricable connectedness of Blackness and queerness for her own life and the need for Third World queer movement to attend to the specific harm and isolation experienced by Black lesbians. Further, she begins to weave Madness and disability into her analysis (2006, 255). In one of the rare moments in her work where she self-positions as "sane" rather than "crazy," she says, "[I]t was only my vision of the existence and possibility of [a community of Third World lesbians and gays] that helped to keep me sane" (ibid). In this same speech, she clarifies for us what she means by "sane" by speaking to the conditions of queer people of color "who had not lived to see this moment" of coalition and community and those who were prevented from coming because of "imprisonment, existence in mental institutions, and

debilitating illness” (ibid, 254). In this case, “sanity” is conceptualized as (especially queer Black) survival against necropolitical forces seeking to control people of color through policing, pathologization, and ultimately state killing.⁴³⁴⁴

Though not always named as explicitly as this, much of Lorde’s work contains discussion of Madness/disability, both in reference to herself and to other people in her life. In this chapter, I offer a Mad reading of one of Lorde’s works that remains undertheorized for its contributions to Mad Studies and disability studies: *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Lorde calls *Zami* her “biomythography,” which she in part defines as an embrace of multiple genres, including “autobiography, but also history, mythology, psychology, all the different channels through which we, in my opinion, absorb information, process it, and create something new” (Lorde 1986, 155). Through this blending of multiple genres, Lorde stories her own life together with the lives of her family, her lovers, and her communities (especially of women). Although Lorde says *Zami* is “really fiction,” she also describes it as “a real recollecting, an attempt at getting into the question of ‘What has helped me to survive the difficult parts of my life from my birth on?’” (ibid, 154). By weaving the stories of significant people in her life together with her own stories, Lorde’s biomythography offers us theorizations of

⁴³ “Necropolitics” is an analytic framework discussed by Achille Mbembe, which he defines as a constellation of ideological, institutional, and material structures which enact “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death,” specifically in terms of global anti-Blackness. For instance, he describes how the same white supremacist eurowestern colonial logics that produced chattel slavery and ongoing anti-Black racism in the US are also at play in formation of “militia economies” in post-colonial African nations (34) and in “late-modern colonial regimes” (38), such as the Israeli occupation of Palestine (2003).

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that Lorde published *Zami* in 1982, just nine years after “homosexuality” was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. This contextualizes Lorde’s biomythography in immediate histories of queer sexualities being pathologized as “mental illnesses,” especially at the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Madness/disability that move scholar-activist conversations beyond the eurowestern academic emphasis on the effects of ableist oppression on the individual Mad/disabled person and toward a confrontation with “the human” and “the self.”

In this chapter, I argue that Lorde opens the radical potential of Madness/disability for coalitional futures through her use of Mad Black poetic methods that generatively confuse, disjoint, and recalibrate the bounds of self/Other, human/nonhuman, and other eurowestern hegemonic dichotomies. As I shall discuss further, Black feminists and other Black Studies scholars assert that eurowestern white supremacist settler colonialism constructs “humanness” against “Blackness” (Wynter 2003; Wilderson 2020). This violent construction problematizes the use of “humanness” as a Mad/Disability Studies analytic and the “promise” of “humanization” for Mad/disabled integration and acceptance. Instead, as Lorde’s work demonstrates, Mad Black poetics redirects the whitestream Mad/Disability Studies desire to “humanize” Mad/disabled people first by throwing into question the meanings of “humanness” and then by challenging attempts to redeem “the human.” Lorde’s Mad Black poetics locates the radical potential of Madness/disability elsewhere—outside the bounds of eurowestern white supremacist colonial worldview; Mad Black poetic methods recalibrate Madness/disability by shifting them away from a white supremacist assimilationist conceptualization of “the human” and towards “unReasonable,” relational understandings of kinship, beingness, and belonging.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ I borrow “unReasonable” from Mad Black radical thought worker La Marr Jurelle Bruce, who theorizes the co-construction of Madness and Blackness through “unReasonable” (that is, outside of Enlightenment’s “Reason”) Black others, such as Buddy Bolden and Nina Simone (2021).

Below I analyze scrambling and dis/crazure as two examples of Lorde's Mad Black poetic methods that enact such recalibrations through a relational approach to Madness/disability. By theorizing the entanglements of race, disability, and gender *relationally*, Lorde's work empowers what Disability Studies scholar Alison Kafer calls a "political/relational" approach to disabled organizing, art, and scholarship-activism (2013). Rather than seeking "humanization," Lorde's Mad Black relationality upsets the very bounds of human/animal, self/Other altogether. The Mad reading I offer below is deeply informed by Black Studies scholar Theri Alyce Pickens' project of "[s]uturing madness and Blackness together" through an analysis of Black speculative fiction in *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* (2019). By theorizing the "complex constellation of relationships...between Blackness and madness" which "are constituted within the fissures, breaks, and gaps in critical and literary texts (ibid, 3), Pickens reveals how, "at the interstices of a raced and gendered madness, we find the seams of the Enlightenment project" (ibid, 13). She argues that Black speculative fiction causes an "unmooring of time, space, and culture" which prompts the necessary tumult required to reimagine the world" (ibid). Further, such works enact "mad Black epistemologies" that enable the articulation of "when and why we might abandon the concept of the human—residues of the Enlightenment project—in favor of Blackness and madness" (ibid, 21). In taking seriously Pickens' cue "to learn how to think madly [and] Blackly" (ibid, xi), my Mad reading looks closely at Mad Black epistemological aspects of *Zami*, such as Black femme suicidality in light of Lorde's definition of mental health.

The presence of Madness/disability in Audre Lorde's work is at times overt, as with the first epigraph, which refers to the death of Lorde's childhood friend Gennie by

suicide. As I discuss later in this chapter, despite her metaphorization of blindness, Lorde offers a definition of Madness/disability in *Zami* that is clearly embedded in critical understandings of systemic oppression: “I have never been able to blind myself to that cruelty, which according to one popular definition of mental health, makes me mentally unhealthy” (1982, 252). The second epigraph calls up the theorization of Lorde’s specific difference as Blackness entangled with queerness,⁴⁶ as evinced when others interpellate her as “both crazy and queer” (Lorde 2007, 91). The mutual theorization of queerness and Blackness is critical, but to it we must “suture” an analysis of disability (Pickens 2019, 4); as I will argue below, the difference of disability is also intrinsically entangled with Blackness. Lorde’s experiences of Madness/disability unfold throughout her work by other names—in this case, being herself, or what poet Elizabeth Alexander identifies as Lorde’s “difference within the self” (1994, 695). Read together, these epigraphs suggest that Lorde is highly conscious of her collage of different selves as “simultaneously multiple and integrated” (ibid, 696) and of the presence of Mad/disabled difference in her life, yet sometimes she stops short of naming any of her selves as Mad or disabled. The complexity of both her overt and implicit discussions of Madness/disability⁴⁷ which permeates her biomythography *Zami* offer crucial theorizations of Blackness together with disability.

⁴⁶ For an explication of Audre Lorde’s contributions at the intersections of Black Studies and Queer Studies, see Amber Jamilla Musser’s chapter “Re-membering Audre: Adding Lesbian Feminist Mother Poet to Black” (2016).

⁴⁷ In general, I write the terms Madness/disability together in recognition of their political inseparability. While each embodies unique histories and connotations, ultimately radical activism is best served by highlighting their mutuality, interconnectedness, and entanglement, rather than by distinguishing them or seeking some fundamental difference between the two. Nevertheless, one or the other of these terms will often float to the top of my analysis, and in those cases, it is helpful to name only one in an effort to achieve specificity of historical contextualization. Madness and disability are always already together—especially in the context of the anti-Black settler colonial US—yet true coalition is achieved not through

Many scholars have recognized the transformative potential of Audre Lorde's work for Disability Studies, especially in terms of integrating analysis of race and Madness/disability (Garland-Thompson 1997; Bolaki 2011; Pickens 2011; Pickens 2019). Much of the scholarship on Lorde's engagement with disability has focused on reading for these overt references to disability, and such work provides crucial foundations for building toward a Disability Studies that is wholly "transformed" by women of color feminisms (Schalk 2018). In their article "Work in the Intersections: A Black Feminist Disability Framework," Black feminist Disability Studies scholars Moya Bailey and Izetta Autumn Mobley turn to Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* as one example of a "Black feminist [text that] can provide a methodological map for the integration of disability, race, and gender, even when disability is not named as such" (2019, 22). I expand on their analysis by turning to *Zami*, which helps concretize the "methodological map" that they are building and also generates possible Mad Black methods for Black feminist disability frameworks. For women of color feminisms to truly transform Disability Studies, we must not only engage Lorde's work through a disability lens but we should also engage disability through Lorde's theoretical lenses. Put another way, what happens when we acknowledge the inseparability of race and disability to read Lorde as a Black feminist Disability Studies scholar?

Building on ongoing conversations about Lorde's place within and contributions to Disability Studies, I argue that acknowledging Lorde as a genealogical root of Mad Studies and Disability Studies opens up transformative possibilities for Mad/disabled

the elision or conflation of difference but the acknowledgement of it as "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde 2007, 111).

scholarship, art, and activism that move us toward the end of what colonial studies scholar Sylvia Wynter theorizes as “our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man” through which Man “overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself” (2003, 260). She asserts that “the struggle of our times...is the struggle against this overrepresentation” (ibid, 262) and she contextualizes this struggle in historical terms, as the Medieval European conceptualization of true humans as Christians began to shift in response to a “new mod of being human,...that of the political subject of the state Man” newly empowered in the wake of the Enlightenment (ibid, 265):

In the wake of the West’s reinvention of its True Christian Self in the transumed terms of the Rational Self of Man, however, it was to be the peoples of the militarily expropriated New World territories (i.e., Indians), as well as the enslaved peoples of Black Africa (i.e., Negroes), that were made to reoccupy the matrix slot of Otherness—to be made into the physical referent of the idea of the irrational/subrational Human Other, to this first degodded (if still hybridly religio-secular) “descriptive statement” of the human in history, as the descriptive statement that would be foundational to modernity (ibid, 266).

Whereas much of Disability Studies has been invested in the work of humanizing disabled people, Wynter and other colonial studies, Afropessimist, and Black Studies scholars complicate such ambitions by interrogating the very meaning of “the human.” According to Pickens, recognizing the sanist ableist nature of Enlightenment worldview, these interrogations are incomplete without accounting for the ways that Madness/disability are entangled with eurowestern constructions of “the human.” She asserts that “Madness and Blackness exert hortatory pressure on all modes of critical analysis, forcing an examination of how we place the human at the center or overlook it as the default premise” (2019, 80). Following these conversations, I assert

that Black feminist Disability Studies frameworks such as those modeled in Lorde's work resist and refute the category of "the human" without resorting to post-humanism, which relies not only on a eurowestern teleological view of time but on the assumption of "the human" as a universal category. Below I address questions of the racist nature of eurowestern time, history, the body/mind, and "the human" by placing Lorde's work into conversation with Black studies and the implications of this conversation for Disability Studies. Ultimately, these implications ask us to attend to Lorde's work as a genealogical root of Mad Studies and Disability Studies, in turn enabling the reimagination of our conceptualizations of Madness/disability, the bodymind,⁴⁸ and "the human."

Disrupting "White Disability Studies": Ongoing Conversations on the Presence of Madness/Disability in Audre Lorde's Work

Christopher Bell's groundbreaking anthology *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions* (2011) contains two contributions which identify and theorize Lorde as an early Black Disability Studies scholar: american⁴⁹ literature scholar Stella Bolaki's "Challenging Invisibility, Making Connections: Illness, Survival, and Black Struggles in Audre Lorde's Work" and Therí Alyce Pickens's "Pinning Down the Phantasmagorical: Discourse of Pain and the Rupture of Post-Humanism in Evelyne Accad's *The Wounded Breast* and Audre Lorde's *The Cancer*

⁴⁸ My use of "bodymind" is derived from Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa's use of "bodymindsoul" in her piece "now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts," in which she conceptualizes the body, mind, soul, and spirit as integrated into a single entity, "[a]ffirming that they are not separate" (2002, 554). I also draw from Mad Studies scholar and rhetorician Margaret Price's attempt to theorize "body" and "mind" together against their splitting via Cartesian duality (2013), as well as Aurora Levins Morales, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Leah Lakshmi Piepna-Samarasinha's use of "bodymindspirit" in their letters to Anzaldúa (2012).

⁴⁹ In this chapter, I follow Lorde's practice of lower-casing the privileged term "america(n)," which serves to "raise her readers' consciousness [by reversing] the terms of Otherness" (Morris 2002, 183).

Journals.” Like many analyses of disability in Lorde’s work,⁵⁰ both chapters mainly focus on Lorde’s revelatory discussions of her experiences as a cancer survivor, particularly her critiques of breast prosthesis. Nevertheless, Bolaki begins her chapter with a brief but crucial analysis of *Zami* that explicates the mutual constitution of race—especially Blackness—and disability. In the remainder of her discussion, Bolaki deeply engages *The Cancer Journals* and *A Burst of Light* to offer insight into the transitions in Lorde’s thinking and writing which resulted from her treatment for breast cancer and later liver cancer. Bolaki’s analysis makes salient Lorde’s contributions to theorizations of Black survival, especially Black disabled women’s survival. Also focused primarily on Lorde’s experiences with cancer, Pickens’ chapter argues that discourses of pain in *The Cancer Journals* advocate for and embody an activist response centered on the experiences of women of color (2011). Importantly, Pickens directs our attention to the ways that Lorde’s embodied theorization of pain, as well as the very structure of *The Cancer Journals*, “provokes political action” by linking “self-reflexivity and introspection” to broader consequences of systemic oppression for whole communities (2011, 82). Just as the individual is intimately embedded within interconnected social contexts and communities, so too do Lorde’s personal narratives and embodied poetry unfold amidst essays which “[expose] the fallacies of the health care industry and how they affect women of color” (ibid). Drawing on this and other analyses that understand Lorde to be theorizing the deep entanglements of individual

⁵⁰ For examples, see Sharon Barnes’ “Marvelous Arithmetics: Prosthesis, Speech, and Death in the Late Work of Audre Lorde” (2008), Diane Price Herndl’s “Reconstructing the Posthuman Feminist Body Twenty Years After Audre Lorde’s *Cancer Journals*” (2009), and Alison Kafer’s chapter “Accessible Futures, Future Coalitions” in *Feminist Queer Crip* (2013).

bodilyminds in complex social contexts and interlocking systems of oppression, I turn to *Zami* as another model for theorizing race, gender, and disability together.

Bolaki and Pickens' chapters illuminate Lorde's intimate discussion of her own embodiment and lived experience, theorizations to which Disability Studies will remain indebted. However, as with much Disability Studies theorization on Lorde's work, neither chapter engages much with Lorde's writings about *other people's* experiences. In this chapter, I analyze aspects of Lorde's writing about other people in her life whom we might identify with Madness/disability, as well as writings about herself, as examples of how Lorde recalibrates the false dichotomy of self/Other and suggests the radical potential of disability to dismantle binary thinking and other aspects of eurowestern colonial cosmology.

Disability Studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thompson theorizes Lorde's work as an early contribution to what today is called Black Disability Studies. One of the few Disability Studies scholars to do so, Garland-Thompson engages Lorde's biomythography *Zami* to "trace...a genealogy of [the] disabled figure" that accounts for the intersections and imbrications of Blackness and disability (1997, 105). She asserts that Lorde draws out the inescapable connections between Blackness and disability by using "devalued bodily characteristics associated with race and disability"—namely, "'blind,' 'hunchback,' 'crazy,' and 'Black'"—to "represent any state or feeling that differs from the privileged norm" (1997, 104). As we know, Lorde critiques the concept of the norm as "mythical," being impossible for all but a privileged few to achieve (2007, 116).

While Garland-Thompson's chapter is an important example of substantive engagement with *Zami* in Disability Studies, she seems to place Lorde (along with Ann Petry and Toni Morrison) into a eurowestern linear chronology of disabled thought/thinking on disability when she says her work "develop[s] a post-modern perspective" of "bodily difference" (ibid, 107). In her poignant talk "The Racial Politics of Time," Black feminist scholar Brittany Cooper asserts that "white people own time," evidence of which is reflected in the ways that white people dictate the pace and value of time (such that Black people's time is worth/less), as well as in white supremacist attempts to obscure histories of "the plunder of Indigenous lands, the genocide of Indigenous people, and the stealing of Africans from their homeland" (2016). Cooper's observations of white ownership and dictatorship of time stem from eurowestern philosopher Georg Hegel's infamous argument that "Africa is no historical part of the world" (ibid). Drawing on Sandra P. Holland, Pickens likewise understands that Blackness has been rendered "as the antithesis of history, its excretion, whereas whiteness stands in for progression, being in time...Blackness is not meant to be a part of history but rather its object" (2019, 29). This understanding facilitates Pickens' turn towards Black speculative fiction as a site of spatio-temporal disruption from which she reads Blackness and Madness together. She explains, "When Blackness and madness exist in the same space, multiple ways of reading should become possible, some of which eschew the possibility of radicality and others that might usher it in" (ibid, 34). Searching for such "multiple ways of reading" in *Zami*, I locate disruptions of eurowestern colonial "reality" through Lorde's Mad Black poetic methods which foreground the entanglement of Blackness and Madness/disability.

Cooper's assertion that white supremacist colonialism places Black people "outside the bounds of time" suggests that Lorde is neither seeking nor able to be "post-modern," as post-modernity derives from the eurowestern colonizer's linear, teleological conception of time; in other words, Lorde cannot be "post-modern" because Black people have been denied entry into modernity—and into time, altogether.⁵¹ Taking Lorde as writing "outside of time," contrary to being a romanticization, opens up the radical potential of Black feminisms to transform Disability Studies by disrupting eurowestern colonial assumptions of teleos. Specifically, Lorde's work contains Mad Black poetic methods which enact such disruptions and through them she models paths to transformation for Disability Studies scholars.

A Mad reading of *Zami* also requires us to complicate Garland-Thompson's interpretation of *Zami* as representing a "coherent subjectivity" (1997, 127). Mad Studies and Black Studies complicate "coherence," "subjectivity," and in particular their combination. Given Pickens' assertion that Blackness always already modifies Madness within the context of the white supremacist settler state, a Mad reading must account for the ways that, as Black Studies scholar Frank B. Wilderson III explains, "anti-Blackness is the genetic material of this organism called the United States of America" (Wilderson III 2020, 194); a Mad reading must also be premised on the fact that whiteness is "the property of free human beings" and Blackness (in particular the

⁵¹ Sylvia Wynter (2003) and Walter D. Mignolo (2011) discuss how the eurowestern construction of "modernity" exists in opposition to Black and Indigenous people, whose nonhuman status configures them as "prehistorical." Modernity conceptually relies on a eurowestern view of time as linear and teleological; Black and Indigenous people are thus overtaken and surpassed by time because they are not moving/unable to progress and thus have no agential place in modernity. In other words, as Brittany Cooper asserts, colonial white supremacy regards Black people as "stuck in the past" (2016).

Black slave) is positioned against “humanness” (Harris 1993, 1721). According to Wilderson, because “one must have a variety of *capacities* to be a Human being,” Black people are denied meaningful subjectivity under colonial white supremacy (2020, 192). Nevertheless, this is not to say that *Zami* fails to cohere a subject nor that Lorde cannot assert herself as a subject but rather that her art-activism must be contextualized within the ongoing effects of “the afterlife of slavery” (Hartman 2007, 6). After all, Wilderson reminds us, “the slave is a sentient being” who, though “born into social death,” can assume the position of a subject in order to “burn the ship or the plantation, in its past and present incarnations, from the inside out” (Wilderson III 2020, 103); in other words, “social death can be destroyed” (ibid).

Further, Pickens argues that “Blackness and madness exceed and shift the boundaries and definitions of human, specifically how the assumed subject positions of unknowable excess (that is, Black madness and mad Blackness) jeopardize the neatness with which we draw the line between self and other” (ibid). The presence of this blurring in *Zami* draws our attention to places in the text which make salient the embeddedness of “self” within community and the entanglement of “self” with “other,” as well as moments of disjuncture. This further troubles Garland-Thompson’s reference to a “*coherent* subjectivity” in that the Mad Black person under colonial white supremacy is not only an embodiment of “unknowable excess” but cannot know things as the “true subject” of the white/human can. This is owing to what Wilderson III describes as the “radical incoherence” of the “black(ened) subject position” that renders (Mad) Black subjects irrational within Reformation, Enlightenment, and related eurowestern ideologies (Wilderson III 2003, 225-226); ultimately, the very presence of

(Mad) Black subjects potentially “throws the notion of humanity itself into crisis” (ibid, 235). The projected incoherence of the Mad Black subject threatens the eurowestern colonial social order by undermining sanity and rationality of which the white subject imagines themselves to be in the greatest possession. In acknowledging this, Disability Studies scholars are moved to seek subjectivities outside of eurowestern colonial cosmology, or even something outside of “the subject” altogether; at the very least, we must accept the possibility that these subjects are not necessarily “coherent.”

Garland-Thompson makes the important assertion that “*Zami*’s mission is to reconstruct the narrative of defiance carried by ‘fat,’ ‘blind,’ ‘lesbian,’ and ‘Black,’ to create a discursive self that incorporates the bodily traits and experiences upon which these terms are based, yet infuses the words with value, power, and fresh meaning” (1997, 126). This discussion is instructive for thinking about Lorde’s theoretical attention to materiality and the self broadly and my conceptualization of Lorde’s Mad Black poetic methods specifically. However, Pickens troubles Garland-Thompson’s argument for failing to “account for the way madness shows up” in texts like *Zami*; this arises from Garland-Thompson’s reliance on the social model, which “dismisses madness as a viable subject position” (2019, 32).

In *Zami*, Lorde stories the “pieces of [her]self” as “coming out blackened and whole” (1982, 5) but not necessarily as “coherent,” as we are reminded each time she reclaims “crazy.” Moreover, from the beginning of *Zami*, we are introduced to Lorde’s “self” as “the age-old triangle of mother father and child, with the ‘I’ at its eternal core,” and as the “triad of grandmother mother daughter, with ‘I’ moving back and forth flowing in either or both directions as need” (1982, 7). The “I,” her bodymind, is “a

living representation of other life older longer wiser. The mountains and valleys, trees, rocks. Sand and flowers and water and stone” (ibid). In this view, the “self” is not merely bound to an individual bodymind but connected to ancestors of all kinds across spacetime.

The late Christopher Bell calls out Disability Studies for its participation in the white supremacist tendency of academia to marginalize disabled people of color in his piece “Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal” (2006). In many ways, we have Bell to thank for the emergence of Black Disability Studies by that name. Pickens incisively identifies Bell’s central provocation in his “Modest Proposal” when she notes that he urges Disability Studies scholars “to seek and find the places where race and disability intersect, write about those spaces, and promote structural change to the field” (2019, 23). She also asserts that Bell models a potential method of Black Disability Studies in his approach to “*reread[ing]*” historical, literary, and cultural figures previously “overlooked for their contributions to Black notions of disability or disabled notions of Blackness” (2019, 24, emphasis mine).

Scrambling and Dis/Crazure: Methods of Mad Black Poetics

Following Bell and Pickens, in this chapter I contribute to existing conversations about Madness/disability and/in the work of Black feminist Audre Lorde by performing a Mad “rereading” of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* to identify places where Lorde is enacting Mad Black poetic methods. By placing *Zami* into conversation with Lorde’s larger oeuvre, I argue that a Mad (re)reading reveals enactments of what I am calling *scrambling* and of what Lorde elsewhere identifies as “dis/crazure” (*The Cancer Journals* 1980, 14). As a warrior poet, Lorde actualizes her understanding that “there

are no new ideas, only new ways of making them felt” by upsetting and recalibrating our perceptions of and relationships to ideas and their communication; scrambling and dis/crazure are two ways of doing this. Lorde enacts scrambling as a Mad Black poetic method of recalibrating our relationships to words, not as much to create “fresh meaning” (as Garland-Thompson suggests) as to call out and confront the histories of colonial white supremacy that weight each word. Scrambling neither ignores nor resolves Lorde’s readers’ various relationships to these histories but instead more deeply troubles them, demanding that we attend to “the costs of hope and the aftermath of degradation” generated by them (Pickens 2019, 17). As another “troubling” Mad Black poetic method, dis/crazure as a method describes the splitting (discrazure) and merging or (re)suturing (crazure) of the self and other. Dis/crazure is not necessarily focused on upsetting our relationships to individual words, but on provoking us to question our assumption of a “coherent subjectivity” of the self—and even of “the self,” altogether.

In *Zami*, Audre Lorde refers to herself as “crazy,” though the way she lays claim to this word is somewhat ambiguous. In *Zami* and elsewhere in her writing, she sometimes uses sanist/ableist language in ways that metaphoricize Madness/disability, likely because these were (and arguably still are) common linguistic tropes at the time that she was writing (e.g. “The arrogant blindness of comfortable white women,” wherein “blindness” euphemistically alludes to racism—to be clear, Lorde experienced beyond the metaphorical, as she was legally blind as a child).⁵² Nevertheless, I argue

⁵² We could also argue that Lorde and other Black women’s metaphoricization of disability possibly works because of the intrinsic material and historical connection between Blackness and disability described by Nirmala Erevelles via Hortense Spillers (2011) and Therí Alyce Pickens (2019), among others.

that Lorde's self-positioning as crazy is intentional and further that she consciously makes linkages between Madness/disability and queerness, Blackness, and womanness. Given these connections, we must take a closer look at Lorde's discursive maneuvers in her writing to understand how she is "thinking Madly and Blackly" (Pickens 2019).

In *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, Pickens scrutinizes the ways in which "there is no Blackness without madness, nor madness without Blackness" within the context of the Middle Passage and the US settler state (2019, 27). She approaches Madness and Blackness as "a complex constellation of relationships," for which a means of theorization lies in close readings of Black speculative fiction that enact "thinking through putatively strange Black minds" (ibid, 4). Pickens' Mad Black theorizing here is instructive for my discursive analysis of Audre Lorde's *Zami*.

In this section, I extend Pickens' relational understanding of Madness and Blackness, as well as her focus upon literary texts, to Lorde's body of work—the body of her work being both her material self and her work as a warrior poet. Pickens' Mad Black analytic reveals Lorde's writerly praxis as Mad Black poetic methods and methodologies. The "relationships between Blackness and madness...are constituted within the fissures, breaks, and gaps in critical and literary texts" (ibid, 15); Pickens discusses the ways that Hortense Spillers' work anticipates that of eurowestern artist-theorists (e.g. Deleuze's concept of "the fold") in her theorization of the "abrogated status" of Black women's flesh (ibid). "The fold," Pickens explains, "exists within the self, between the self and other, and between groups of others, as a space from which to interpret and understand the various critical and creative possibilities available" and further "it is emblazoned on Black flesh" (ibid, 15-16). She also elaborates Black

Studies scholar Fred Moten’s concept of “the break” as “signal[ing] the kind of rupture that creates and catastrophizes Blackness and madness” (ibid, 16). Drawing upon these intellectual genealogies rooted in Black Studies, Pickens “[reads] texts countertermnemonically” to investigate how “fiction opens up the possibilities critical conversations have foreclosed” (ibid). Given that Lorde described her biomythography as “fiction built from many stories” (quoted in Tate 1986, 115), a Mad reading of *Zami*’s blurring of the line between self and other must take seriously what Pickens calls “the costs of hope and the aftermath of degradation” for Black mad and mad Black subjects (2019, 16-17). Amidst the folds in *Zami*, we can see examples of Mad Black poetics in Lorde’s writing—specifically of dis/crazure and scrambling.

Scrambling “healthy young female animals”: Queer Embodiment and Black-/Mad-ness

I am rereading *Zami: A New Spelling for My Name*, trying to pay not just closer but different attention to Audre Lorde’s words. As my eyes pass over the page and take in “healthy young female animals,” I am startled: did I read that right? I reread the paragraph, confused that a moment of community and revelry is broken by this agonistic phrase. Seeing these four words right in the middle of her lush narrative breaks me from the trance of her storytelling. They fixate me. I try to read on but a few paragraphs later I find myself going back to this line:

We were healthy young female animals mercifully more alive than most of our peers, robust and active women, and our blood was always high and our pockets empty and a free meal in convivial surroundings--meaning around other lesbians--was a big treat for most of us, even if purchased at the price of a bottle of beer, which was fifty cents, with many complaints (222).

I feel like I can't get past them; they are too jarring, too distracting. Rather than trying to brush off the problematic nature of the words "healthy," "young," "female," and "animals," it is that these troubling words are strung together that draws my attention to them. They are problematic on their own and even more so together. Their distracting, demanding composition hints that Lorde's meaning eludes us if we take them at face value. So I try not to; I try to read them another way.

Firstly, by this point in *Zami*, Lorde has just spent a couple hundred pages making reference to how not conventionally "healthy" she is, nor is her queer community conventionally "healthy." I am also sure Lorde would be the first to argue that "youth" is relative, given her experience of stigmatization for dating Eudora in Mexico.⁵³ "Female" has been wielded against Black women in very particular ways, of which Lorde is undoubtedly aware, and moreover she clearly thought prescribed gender is a violent artifice and gender altogether is constructed (*Zami* 221). And finally, "animals": in ways intimately entangled with the word "female," the word "animal" inevitably calls to mind all the ways that Black women have been likened to animals by white colonizers. This word especially seems to suggest Lorde's intention to allude to a complexity of meanings, to scramble the surface-level meaning of this loaded word, a word with enough baggage to outweigh the whole sentence. And if she desires to scramble this word, is she then also scrambling the three words preceding it?

⁵³ The fact that Eudora is several years Lorde's senior draws disapproval from their community; this exasperates Lorde, who cannot understand why this should matter in the context of two women loving each other. She leaves us with the impression that she does not appreciate being infantilized, made clear by her irritation with Frieda for sometimes treating her "like Tammy's contemporary, whom Lorde describes as "pre-adolescent" (171-172).

By “scrambling,” I mean disorienting and disunifying the word from its meaning, or its social meaning, which forces a reinterpretation of the word relationally—especially in relation to the words around it. Below, I offer an example of Lorde’s deployment of scrambling that renegotiates the meaning of four words: “young healthy female animals.” This renegotiation lands differently for each reader, such that the resonances and dissonance of these words together can simultaneously fuel celebration and survival for queer Black women and generate discomfort for their white allies. In particular, white Mad/disabled organizers, artists, and scholars are confronted with the problematic nature of “humanist” desires and the failures of “humanization” to move Black, Brown, and Indigenous disabled people towards liberation, given that the (neo)liberal structures within which many of us exist represent “[a]merica’s continued inability to accept the *full humanity* of [B]lack bodies” and even participate in ongoing dehumanization of Black people (Miller 2017, 136). Such a Mad Black poetic method forces a confrontation around the stakes of our work and the visions we are striving for as communities of Mad/disabled people living, learning, and working together.

Perhaps the best way to scramble these four words is to put them altogether right in the same clause, sequentially even. Maybe only Lorde can do this, along with a small cohort of warrior poets (e.g. June Jordan, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Harryette Mullen). Scrambling is one technique she uses to imbue language with (new) meaning, which is part of her writerly convention that “there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt” (*Sister Outsider* 2007, 39). In this case, this scrambling is an effecting of putting these four words together in this particular order. Scrambling is just one poetic technique that Lorde uses to convey “new ways of making [ideas] felt,” but it

is particularly salient to discuss here for the ways it discombobulates (“throws into a state of mental uncertainty”) meaning. I argue that we can read Lorde’s “scrambling” as a Black Mad poetic method, one which is imbued with Mad Black women’s knowledge and wisdom about the specificity of language for, by, and about Black women. As mentioned above, Pickens delineates a framework for understanding Madness and Blackness not as analogous (as with many especially whitestream Disability Studies analyses) but as relational, meaning that “madness modifies how we understand Blackness” and “Blackness modifies...who and what is mad” (2019, 6). In other words, Disability Studies scholars who engage Lorde’s work must account for the complexity of interrelation between Madness and Blackness—the relational constellation Pickens effects in her title with a double colon (*Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*) which “invite[s] us to think” of the ways “Black and mad function together...as more vast in scope than heretofore imagined” (2019, 6). Scrambling not only helps us think through the relationality of Blackness and Madness but also of these markers/embodiments together with womanness, queerness, kinship, and humanness. Queer Black women are uniquely positioned in relation to each of these concepts, often in exclusion of them within the whitestream imaginary, as Lorde narrates for us in her biomythography. As such, queer Black women recalibrate each of these words and imbue them with meaning that departs from a default masculinist (and by turns homonationalist) whitestream imaginary which literally cannot account for that which it has sought to write out of each of these words and social categories.

This is not to say that Lorde is using the same rhetorical maneuver (scrambling) each time she appears to “list” words in the same order. Rather, I feel like an effect of

these various maneuvers is to build something she wants us to notice, without necessarily (literally) spelling things out. Maybe I'm crazy for noticing. Maybe I notice because I'm crazy. Maybe the noticing makes me crazy. Seeing something that's not there. Let's pretend that it is there, though. Then "healthy young female animals" is now saying something that is not simply 1) healthy / 2) young / 3) female / 4) animals.

As mentioned above, Lorde's biomythography (as with much of her other writing) troubles easy definitions of "health" and "wellness." Her use of language around health and the body helps us understand that Lorde's definitions of these words are relative to her communities, especially the racialized margins of her queer community in New York. Lorde often describes other queer Black women in her circles as "fat, and Black, and beautiful" (as discussed in more detail below), and her scrambling of "healthy" is done in relation to these descriptions. By positioning queer fat Black women as "more alive than most of our peers" (222), she subverts medicalized whitestream equations of "healthiness" with light-skinnedness, thinness, heterosexuality, and gender conformity.

It is often readily apparent where she finds something "unhealthy": she describes her time in the electronics plant in Stamford as "entering Dante's Inferno" in that it was "too cold and too hot, gritty, noisy, ugly, sticky, stinking, and dangerous" (Zami 126). She presents working class jobs stripped of their upper class-imposed romanticization. Where some might overlook the noxious grind of the plant workers' day-to-day in neoliberal praise of "hard work" for "self-improvement," itself key to wellness under capitalism, Lorde viscerally illustrates the oppressive environment of her blue collar eight-hour work day, how it is "offensive to every sense" (ibid). This

highly embodied work provides the means for Lorde's escape to Mexico, allowing her to save up money (one form of the American dream), but at the same time exposes her to "constant low radiation far in excess of what was considered safe even in those days" (ibid). Troubling though her representation of her friend Gennie's death bed is troubling, we know from Lorde's description of "the crumpled flower on the hospital bed" and the "metallic-smelling foam at the corners of [Gennie's] mouth, blackened and wet" that the circumstances of Gennie's death make her feel ill. Were a Mentally Well person to describe such a scene, it would be inescapably sanist, a sad and fearful portrait of premature Mad Black death; because Lorde is per her own (self-)definition "mentally unhealthy," this scene is not just a depiction of Lorde observing Gennie but rather a mirror reflecting the precarity of Mad Black life back to Lorde, who is fully cognizant that Mad Black queer women "were never meant to survive" (1980, 21).

Elsewhere in *Zami*, we see Lorde discuss other aspects of embodiment that, in whitemainstream ableist discourse, are immediately recognizable as "unhealthy," but to which Lorde refers in such casual terms—"we truly quaked in our orthopedic shoes" (16); "[w]hen I was five years old and still legally blind" (21)—that we might pass them over without noticing their "unhealthiness."

That Lorde tucks "healthy" and "young" beside each other seems to be no accident. It feels ironic for her to call herself and her friends healthy and young, as in their early twenties they have lived more than their twenty-some years suggests. By this age, Lorde has experienced the death of a close friend; leaving home at 17; an abortion; intense romantic relationships; and the death of a parent, which were not unusual aspects of the queer Black woman's experience in her day (nor even, arguably, today).

She stories being “young and Black and gay” as an intense loneliness, a “[having] to do it alone” that grew her up faster—maybe she would say too fast (176). She recognizes that she left home as “an adolescent” at 17 but within the year was working more than full-time and living on her own (104). Many contradictions are bound up in her use of the word “young,” also pointing to how Black youth are subject to the violence of a white supremacist society that “adultifies” them even as small children because Blackness is positioned as a lack of innocence in the white settler imaginary (Sharpe 2010; Epstein, et al. 2017; Blake and Epstein 2019). Saidiya Hartman explains how this racialized adultification of Black girls dates back to the earliest days of US settler colonialism and the slave trade via “the annihilating violence of the slave ship” (2008, 8-9). In her monograph *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Hartman articulates the effects of racist colonial violence as cumulative, causing time to catch up and latch onto Black girls and women in particular ways (2019). In storying the archived 19th century photo of an unnamed Black girl, Hartman writes: “So much time accumulates on her small figure, the girl might well be centuries old, bearing the weight of slavery and empire, embodying the transit of the commodity, suturing the identity of the slave and the prostitute” (ibid, 27). Because time functions differently for Black women and girls, the language we use to describe age and aging also functions differently than it does for white and light-skinned people, connoting both the weight of intergenerational trauma and the emptiness of white eurowestern history’s removal of Black people from time. This connotation, then, sets us up to think about the way “young” works in relationship to the next two words in Lorde’s sequence.

“Female animals”: white supremacy has combined these two words through the violences of the Middle Passage and chattel slavery in reference to Black women and their collective meaning of degradation continues to reverberate within “the afterlife of slavery” (Hartman 2007, 6). This afterlife includes the material conditions of misogynoir effected by defining “human” as (masculine) whiteness and thus, against this, “anti-human” as Blackness.⁵⁴ Black Studies scholar Christina Sharpe calls the everyday conditions of anti-Black racism “the weather,” within which “Black life” constitutes “the flesh, [the] bodies, to which anything and everything can be and is done (2016, 16). In reference to Black women, “female” is deployed as a distinct category of anti-human difference outside and against “our present ethnoclass genre of the human, Man” (Wynter 2003, 312). Apart from the fact that the word “female” is a reductive, reproductive framing set in contrast to “Man,” “female” has historically been wielded in particularly violent ways against Black women. As discussed in her invaluable analysis “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Black critical theorist Hortense Spillers discusses how, during slavery, Black women and Black men were “degendered” and animalized by “female” and “male” respectively, reflecting their status as “nonhuman” property—a rejection from the status of “human” which continues today (1987; Wilderson III 2010). We know that Lorde is acutely aware of this “nonhuman” status, this “ontological negation...within and after the legacies of slavery” (Sharpe 2016, 14), for she asserts that Black women “were never meant to survive. Not as human beings” (1980, 21).

⁵⁴ Coined and proliferated by Black feminist Moya Bailey and Black photographer and creator Trudy (aka @thetrudz), the term “misogynoir” describes the specificity of Black women’s experiences of anti-Black racist misogynyny (2018).

“Healthy young female animals” sounds like a turn-of-phrase that an outsider—especially a cis straight white man—would apply to Lorde’s group of friends, insofar as it borders on insult. The totality of these words being applied to queer women (of color) suggests that Lorde is tongue-in-cheek taking note of this and further is reclaiming these words, in particular for herself and the very few other crazy queer Black women (“exotic sister outsiders”) in her circles (Lorde 2001, 177). Scrambling, then, is acting as a Mad Black poetic method of reclamation.

This idea of threading words together as a way to scramble their meaning shows up in many places in Lorde’s writing. Noting that Lorde “always introduced herself with a long list,” writer Jackie Kay argues that such a list was meant to demonstrate Lorde’s complexity of identity in a time when it was “[i]t was unusual...to name yourself so particularly” and that by doing so, Lorde was demonstrating “that she would not prioritise one aspect of her identity over another” (2017, np). Black feminist scholar-activist Angela Davis goes a step further in arguing that, rather than simply “listing” her identities, Lorde’s poetic technique in her self-introduction as a “Black lesbian mother warrior poet” was a strategic choice meant “to demystify assumptions that these terms cannot inhabit the same space: *Black and lesbian; lesbian and mother; mother and warrior; warrior and poet*” (Symposium Keynote 2014, emphasis added). I argue that the effect of putting these words in this very particular sequence also works to scramble their meaning not only by “demystify[ing] assumptions” but also by confusing and recalibrating projections about Black women by highlighting the white cisheteropatriarchal anxieties that generate such projections.

Davis points out Lorde's intentionality here to disrupt the dependency on listing by those interested in "diversifying" institutions, wherein "it is often assumed that diversity is equivalent to the end of racism" (ibid). Whereas one of Lorde's major contributions to theory, according to Davis, was to explicate the importance of *difference* as a creative repository, we can see that her words have often been appropriated *as diversity*, such that the act of "listing" her identifications signaled her "diversity." Feminist killjoy and affect theorist Sara Ahmed points out that "diversity" often functions as "a replacement term, taking the place of earlier terms such as 'equal opportunities' or 'antiracism'" (2012, 52). As both form and function of diversity rhetoric, lists are used as stand-ins for and diversions from what's missing, which are the very things they describe (e.g. "diversity, equity, inclusion"). Listing can become a form of complicity when it serves the function of defining and policing what's normal. As Davis asserts, however, when Lorde puts words together—"Age, Race, Class, and Sex"—she does so with great intention (2014, np). In this sense, Lorde is not making a "list," but she is putting words together in this way to build *something else* that is also *something more* than just these words added together. Rather than cohering their meaning, as the function of listing often does, Lorde is scrambling their meaning not only as individual words but also *in relation to each other*, as Davis' example illustrates.

Another clue for thinking through a Mad Black poetic of scrambling appears not long after this mention of "healthy young female animals." In a self-description made all the more salient and powerful for how it immediately precedes a racist remark from a white lesbian about her skin color, Lorde says that she feels "full of myself, knowing I

was fat and Black and very fine” (2001, 223). Again, this sequence of words scrambles their meanings: under white supremacist neoliberal capitalist colonialism, fatness and Blackness are the opposite of fine, but Lorde’s fullness of self scrambles the colonial imposition of sanist/ableist anti-Blackness. On the other side of this scrambling, fatness and Blackness are reclaimed as desirable not only on their own terms but in relation to each other. Her reclamation here stands in stark contrast to her observation that, in the 1950s queer scene of New York, “[a]ll too frequently, undesirable meant Black” (ibid, 220). As with Davis’ unpacking of “Black lesbian mother warrior poet,” in this example, fatness, Blackness, and fineness are situated in relation to each other, juxtaposing them in order to highlight their apparent contradiction; yet unlike Davis’ example, these three words are punctuated with “and,” suggesting their additions are cumulatively powerful.

She also punctuates these words in other places, as when she describes another queer Black woman living in the Village in the 1950s: “Diane was fat, and Black, and beautiful, and knew it long before it became fashionable to think so” (ibid, 177). That Lorde peppers in these descriptions throughout *Zami* predicts the renewed cooptation of Black (especially women’s) looks—from hairstyles, jewelry, makeup, and clothing to affect, humor, and beyond—into the whitestream in a continuation of the longstanding white supremacist tradition of setting up Blackness as “anti-human” while also thieving from it “culture” and (literal and metaphorical) “flavor.” “[T]his plastic, anti-human society,” she asserts, relegates “fat Black girls born almost blind and ambidextrous” to “[u]nattractive[ness]” despite this constant and seemingly paradoxical theft of Black aesthetics (ibid, 181).

Similarly, Lorde's stating that she is full of herself because she is "fat and Black and very fine" is an enactment of Black artist-activist Sonya Renee Taylor's assertion that "the body is not an apology" (2018). Lorde refuses to apologize for her fat Blackness and in fact celebrates herself and all fat Black women against their framing as "excessive" within white supremacist colonialism and specifically what Taylor identifies as "the global Body-Shame Profit Complex" (ibid, 39). Moreover, Lorde's words work together against the racist, ableist, fatmistic "voice" Taylor describes as often speaking within Black women, telling them they are "too much, too fat, too Black, too ugly" (Taylor 2019).

As I have demonstrated above, these examples of scrambling make salient the transformative potential of Mad Black poetic methods for confusing and disunifying hegemonic or assumed meaning in order to reclaim and recalibrate words like "fat," "Black," and "female," not by ignoring the sociohistorical weight of these words but by holding multiple meanings simultaneously. Scrambling not only disunifies hegemonic meaning from individual words (e.g. "female," "animal") but also their combination (e.g. "female animal," "fat and Black and beautiful"). Reclamation and recalibration via Mad Black poetic methods such as scrambling not only generate discomfort around these weighted words but interrogate moves toward humanization in Mad Studies and Disability Studies that fail to account for the ongoing histories of anti-Black racism, misogynoir, and white supremacist colonialism that weight them in the first place.

Dreaming Mad Black Resistance: Crazure as a Mad Black Poetic Method of Recovery and Survival

In this section, I Madly read for Lorde's Mad Black poetic method of "crazure." Crazure has a two-fold function implied by the multiple meanings of "craze" in that it makes salient the presence of Madness, as well as crazy-making structures, in the world of *Zami* and also recombines and (re)sutures together the stories of "others." This recombination works to recover stories that would otherwise be lost in a sanist/ableist white supremacist society that does not want to see queer Mad/disabled Black women nor hear about their experiences, suffering, hopes, or dreams. In this section, I look at two of those stories: the stories about Lorde's "first true friend" Gennie and later Muriel, a partner whom Lorde "loved...like [her] own life" (1982, 211). For those who have not read *Zami*, it is important for me to reveal up front that Gennie dies by suicide, which Lorde stories as a resistance and retaliation against the sanist/ableist misogynoir forces violently oppressing Gennie and all Mad/disabled Black feminized people. To be clear, Lorde's intent is neither to romanticize Gennie's death nor render it pure tragedy, but to theorize the true reasons for Gennie's death as rooted in systemic oppression and to resist the desire of sanist/ableist white supremacy to annihilate the lives and even the memory of Mad Black girls. By crazing their stories together and thus linking herself to Mad Blackness, Lorde offers a complicated portrait of Gennie that provokes a reimagining of Mad/disabled dreams and futures that centers Mad Black women, upon whose freedom and survival all Mad/disabled liberation depends.

In an anti-sanist/ableist move, Lorde deploys the method of crazure to try to tell the truth about the loves in her life without glossing over the implications of her feelings of guilt and complicity through silence. So too does she weave her story together with Gennie's without making Gennie's story about her. That is, her Mad

Black poetic method of *crazure* honors Gennie within broader experiences of Mad/disabled Black women by suturing together truths about their suffering with visions of their joy and their deep love of life. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha alludes to this method of crazing together that which “is imperfect and decorating it with gold” through her discussion of white femme liturgist Blyth Barnow’s theorization of *kintsugi* as embodying “[t]he notion that our cracks, our wounds can be beautiful too. So much femme labor, femme love, comes from that place of breaking” (2019, 15-16). In this way, Lorde’s storying of Gennie together with her own life does not stop at mourning Gennie’s death but recovers the stories of their relationship to join in Gennie’s resistance and thus fight for Mad Black survival. By reading Lorde’s storying here as a form of *crazure*, simplistic narratives of suicide-as-tragedy must be rethought in the context of Gennie’s suicide as a Mad Black form of protest and resistance. Her protest resonates through *Zami*; although Gennie does not survive, moments of her life survive in Lorde’s biomythography to testify against the necropolitical conditions of anti-Black racism in the US, or “antiblackness as total climate” (Sharpe 2016, 21).

In a segment from a later chapter in *Zami* is one of Lorde’s more direct acknowledgements of the entanglement of nation, class, gender, and sexuality—and especially queerness and Blackness—with Madness/disability. In a critique of her generation that continues to apply long after her passing, Lorde delivers a scathing summary of the highly romanticized 1950s America:

Rather than the idyllic picture created by false nostalgia, the fifties were really straight white america’s cooling-off period of let’s pretend we’re happy and that this is the best of all possible worlds and we’ll blow those nasty commies to hell if they dare to say otherwise.” The Rosenbergs had been executed, the transistor

radio had been invented, and *frontal lobotomy was the standard solution for persistent deviation*” (220, emphasis mine).

Throughout *Zami*, she makes it clear that her family’s (and all Black people’s) disfranchisement from the amerikkkan dream arises from the anti-Black conditions of the United States, within which “[a]merican racism was a new and crushing reality that [her] parents had to deal with every day of their lives...[which they handled] as a private woe” (69). Even more particularly for her, those anti-Black conditions, even and including within leftist circles “among whom color and racial differences could be openly examined and talked about,” are also *queermisic* conditions, such that “being gay was [seen as] ‘bourgeois and reactionary’” (148).

The notion of the fifties as an “idyllic” time persists today, perpetuated especially by white settlers who are today part of the “Boomer generation,” while in the sixties they fashioned themselves as peace-loving hippies rebelling against the nationalism and endless war of US heteropatriarchy. Although there is a sliver of irony that these former hippies are now good pro-nationalist, pro-capitalist, patriotic citizen-consumers, this is also evidence of the storytelling power of the US settler imaginary at work. Even in the 70s when Lorde was writing *Zami*, she foresaw the continuation of this romanticization of the fifties with its particularly violent rendition of the white nuclear family as neoliberal ideal, its strictures growing into standards against which all bodyminds would be measured and by whose logics Black, queer, disabled, and Other bodyminds would continue to be punished. These standards increasingly helped identify deviations in ways that appeared to depart from the now distasteful overt eugenics of the Nazis—for which, of course, they studied US white supremacist colonial traditions

(Dolmage 2018, 45)—and in actuality continued eugenics in more subtle forms. These eugenicist standards produced in turn a “standard solution” for deviant bodyminds—I take Lorde’s reference to the “frontal lobotomy” both metaphorically and literally.

As we know from the stories of her “first true friend” Gennie (87) and later her tempestuous lover Muriel, pathologization and other tactics of psychiatric policing were as commonly wielded against deviant subjects—queer and Black women, especially, and queer Black women above all, she notes—as a means to subdue the subversive threat they posed. In this section, I engage a Mad dream analysis of Lorde’s recollection of a dream encounter with the concept of “dis/crazure” in *The Cancer Journals* (1980, 14); I interpret her storying of Gennie and Muriel through what I assert is Lorde’s Mad Black poetic method of dis/crazure in order to show how Lorde complicates the popular notion of “mutual constitution” as a Disability Studies analytic.

In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde recounts the following dream:

I dreamt I had begun training to change my life, with a teacher who was very shadowy. I was not attending classes, but I was going to learn how to change my whole life, live differently, do everything in a new and different way. I didn't really understand, but I trusted this shadowy teacher. Another young woman who was there told me she was taking a course in “language crazure,” the opposite of discrazure (the cracking and wearing away of rock). I thought it would be very exciting to study the formation and crack and composure of words, so I told my teacher I wanted to take that course. My teacher said okay, but it wasn't going to help me any because...I wouldn't get anything new from the class...It's very exciting to think of me being all the people in this dream (1980, 14-15, emphasis original).

Taking dreams seriously is a methodological move that enables a Mad dream analysis of Lorde’s work. Lorde took her own dreams seriously and this prompts us to take them as seriously as her writings on waking life. To this end, I assert that her

references to (language) dis/crazure can be read as an example of a Mad Black poetic which lays bear the entanglements of race and Madness/disability. My analysis follows threads introduced in Black poet-scholar Elizabeth Alexander's important article, "'Coming Out Blackened and Whole': Fragmentation and Reintegration in Audre Lorde's *Zami* and *The Cancer Journals*" (1994). In her vivid and percipient analysis, Alexander recovers Lorde's dream, including its references to dis/crazure, as an example of Lorde creating "a hybrid language, a composite, a creation of new language to make space for the 'new' of the self-invented body" (1994, 696). While most of Alexander's discussion focuses on other aspects of Lorde's work, her brief analysis of dis/crazure models how to take dreams seriously, illuminates dreams as spacetime which "allows for the simultaneous existence of different selves coexisting as a single self" (ibid, 698), and recognizes the connections between dis/crazure and "craziness" that arise from "dreams play[ing] tricks with language" (ibid). This latter observation draws our attention to the multiple meanings of the word "craze": "to produce minute cracks on the surface or glaze of something; to make insane" (Merriam-Webster 2020).

Expanding on Alexander's analysis, I want to move deeper with "dis/crazure" by understanding it as a Mad Black poetic method that, though unnamed, manifests elsewhere in Lorde's work. Lorde's dream tells us that, whereas discrazure is "the cracking and wearing away of" rock/language, crazure is "the opposite" (1980, 14), which Alexander interprets as Lorde "coming to see the roots of *craze*" and her own craziness "as, in fact, whole and sane" (1994, 698). I agree with Alexander that Lorde does indeed come to identify more and more with Madness conceptually and literally as she comes of age. However, I disagree that Lorde treats "whole" and "sane" as

synonymous. Though she calls herself “crazy” several times throughout *Zami*, at no point does she call herself “sane.” In fact, per her negative definition of “mental health” as discussed further below, Lorde positions herself as “mentally unhealthy” (1982, 252). This is crucial to understanding the concepts of dis/crazure as remediation or recovery of the self being “continually brought back together from disassembled fragments” (698) rather than as an attempt to “cure” the self. Put another way, sanity is not a prerequisite for wholeness in Lorde’s Mad Black poetics. In this section, I engage Lorde’s storying of Gennie and Muriel as examples of the Mad Black poetic method of dis/crazure which offer “Black notions of disability [and] disabled notions of Blackness” (Pickens 2019, 24).

We meet Genevieve, or Gennie, early on in *Zami*. One year Audre’s senior, Gennie is also Black and a peripheral member of their high school clique, “The Branded.”⁵⁵ She lives with her single working mother in Harlem. Audre recounts how she spends most days the summer of her fifteenth year with Gennie, which makes them very close; while Audre does not refer to Gennie as a girlfriend, their closeness is obvious in their camaraderie, hand-holding, and mutual admiration. Audre’s closeness to Gennie is a complex mix of romantic and sisterly feelings, and it is in part this storying of Gennie and Audre’s closeness with her that reveals Audre’s own fearful understanding that, had her circumstances been different, she might have experienced the same fatal sanist/ableist violence: Gennie does not survive because of the “world’s cruelty that destroys its own young in passing” (1982, 251). Though Gennie and Audre

⁵⁵ To distinguish when I am citing from Lorde’s biomythography, I will refer to the narrator of *Zami* as “Audre.”

are different in many ways, Lorde's work theorizes the violent white supremacist colonial conditions of the "the mouth of this dragon we call america" that caused Gennie's death as sanist/ableist through her recognition that Mad/disabled queer Black girls "we were never meant to survive" (1980, 21). Throughout *Zami*, we see how fragments of Gennie's life are bound up in Audre's. I argue that we can read Lorde's resuturing and binding together of Gennie's story with her own as enacting a Mad Black poetic method of crazure in that Lorde's attempt to remediate the sanist/ableist and racist violence done to Gennie by storying her in all Mad Black complexity. By "remediate" I mean that Lorde redresses the systemic sanist/ableist violence that Gennie experiences from within their Black community, as well as the cruel and death-bringing neglect of a larger anti-Black racist society that kills Mad/disabled Black girls "out of not noticing or caring about [their] destruction" (1982, 252).

It is also during this summer of Audre's fifteenth year that Gennie first meets her father and "f[alls] completely under his charming net" (91). When Gennie's mother refuses to allow Gennie to go live with him, she "beg[ins] telling [Audre], and anybody else who would listen, that she [is] going to kill herself at the end of the summer" (ibid). Audre often listens to Gennie "[speak] about killing herself as an irreversible and already finished decision, as if there were no more questions," until one day she asks Gennie, "[W]hat about all of us who love you?" meaning [herself] and Jean and all [Gennie's] other friends" (ibid). Gennie replies, "Well, I guess you will all just have to take care of yourselves, now won't you?" And it suddenly seem[s] to [Audre] a very foolish thing to have said, and [she] ha[s] no answer for her" (ibid). At this point, Gennie's morbid thoughts and expression of suicidal ideation is still intangible to

Audre, who “both did and didn’t believe her” (ibid). She tries instead to push the thought from her mind, to downplay Gennie’s casual references to “how much time there was left before she was going to die” (ibid). Writing about Gennie’s death with many years of hindsight, Lorde hints at her feelings of guilt and shame for not being able to prevent Gennie’s death while also continually theorizing the broader overlapping contexts of sanism/ableism, anti-Black racism, adultism, and misogynoir that seek to annihilate embodied difference like Gennie’s.

Lorde’s brief narrations on Gennie’s suicidality call to mind Ntozake Shange’s choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*: Gennie could herself be one of the nameless rainbow women representing the different realities of “the fullness of their lives” (1989, xii), which included in each case some form of pain and heartbreak—except that Gennie does not survive. Where Shange narrates the survivor’s resilience and journeys to (self-)love, Lorde stories a girl who is her first true friend who is like her sister, a Mad(dened) Black girl who does not live to share her own stories. By storying the intertwining cracks of each of their lives together—a form of crazure—Lorde re-members Gennie both as part of herself and of all Mad Black girls, even as Gennie is her own person.

After a “botched” suicide attempt (ibid, 92), Gennie’s mother allows her to go live with her father. Though they drift apart during the ensuing autumn and winter, it becomes clear to Audre that Gennie is being abused by her father; even Audre’s mother Linda suspects that Gennie’s “good-for-nothing” father is sexually abusing her, especially after Gennie visits Audre one night in March 1949, her face scratched and her voice scared (ibid, 94-96). She asks for Audre’s help, but Audre guiltily declines;

she is afraid that allowing Gennie to stay will provoke her mother to ground her and thus make it impossible for her to go anywhere. As if in confirmation of this, instead of showing sympathy for Gennie, Linda warns Audre to limit her time with ““this girl and her parents’ business”” (ibid, 96). Audre holds her anger in, lest she is forbidden to see Gennie altogether.

On a Saturday in spring 1949, Gennie is hospitalized after swallowing several capsules she had filled with arsenic. Audre goes to see her that evening and again on Sunday, at which time she asks Gennie why she is going through with this suicide. ““Why what?”” is Gennie’s response, ““You know why”” (ibid, 100). “Those were the last words Gennie ever spoke to” Audre (ibid). Gennie dies the next day, leaving a hole in Audre’s life that later prompts her to write about “the deep dark silences that ate of the so-young flesh” of her first true friend, who is also in many ways her first love even though they never had the chance to “tell the passions that [they] felt” (ibid, 97). Much later, Lorde would come to reflect on these “deep dark silences” as one of the definable features of the sanist landscape of white supremacy; the ability to ignore the cruelty of this landscape, she writes, is “one popular definition of mental health,” and her inability to ignore it “makes [her] mentally unhealthy” (ibid, 252). This definition refuses what Fred Moten describes as a pathologizing question posed by early Black humanists, “What’s wrong with black folk?” (2008, 177). Against the internalized racism and gaslighting present in this question, Lorde problematizes the very notion of pathologization by holding up a mirror to sanist/ableist colonial white supremacy, forcing it to see its innate cruelty, which directly contradicts even its own notions of what constitutes a “sane” and “reasonable” human. Lorde’s reformulations of “mental

health/illness” thus suggest to us that she might respond that the “wrongness” of Black people cannot be understood by looking at Black people, themselves, but at the “*crazy-making*” systems to which they are subjected (Bailey and Mobley 2019, 31, emphasis original).

If we take Lorde’s definition of “mental health/illness” as the basis for approaching Madness as an organizing framework, then we can move beyond Mad identity as simply an individually-derived center around which Madness is politicized to organizing for social justice by understanding how society treats Mad Black girls. This definition also helps us make sense of the way Lorde self-positions as “crazy” and offers one possible answer to Moya Bailey and Izetta Autumn Mobley’s question, “Is there a way to reclaim crazy, or at least acknowledge the ways that anti-Black racism is *crazy-making* for both white and Black people alike?” (ibid). Lorde’s reclamation of crazy in *Zami* takes place in the context of her unfolding analysis of the crazy-making conditions of anti-Black racist america, asserting the inseparability of Madness/disability from those conditions. *Zami* also offers examples of how these conditions are crazy-making for both Black and white people, explicating the differences in causes and outcomes these groups. In particular, Lorde contributes to an analysis of crazy-making conditions and their necropolitical effects upon Mad Black girls through storying Gennie’s life and death.

Understanding that Madness/disability is inseparable from conditions of anti-Blackness constitutes an important shift in the foundations of Mad/disabled activism and scholarship, which has tended to be white-dominated and white-centered by virtue of its often-individualist politics (Bailey and Mobley 2019, 23). *Zami* contributes

conceptually and practically to “[a] Black feminist disability framework,” and turning to Lorde’s work as a genealogical root of Mad/Disability Studies furthers the project of “dislodg[ing] the white male body as the central normative body” in these fields” (ibid, 27). Even where broader social contexts (including race and racism, nationality, xenomisia, etc.) are more thoroughly theorized and Madness is dislodged as a purely identity-based category, there is still often a loss of words with regard to Mad Black experience, particularly the experiences of Mad Black girls.

Audre’s parents’ reaction to Gennie’s suicide would eventually irreparably damage her relationship with them, especially as Audre resists Linda’s attempts to manage the crisis by recreating her daughter as “some pain-resistant replica of herself” (ibid, 101). Perhaps herself motivated by (intergenerational) trauma, Linda’s initial response to her daughter after learning of Gennie’s death is to say, “I’ll fix you some tea. You mustn’t be upset too much by all this, dear heart” (ibid). On the one hand, Linda is (perhaps willfully) oblivious to true meaning of Gennie’s relationship for Audre; on the other, perhaps she knows of Audre’s feelings for Gennie and that is partly why she warns her daughter to “[b]e careful who you go around with” (ibid). Given Linda’s own intergenerational trauma to which Lorde frequently alludes but often does not discuss in depth, it may be understandable why Lorde’s her mother would attempt to gloss over the tremendous pain of such a loss; Lorde, however, receives this “care” as “another assault” (ibid), a retraumatization. Even after Audre moves out of her parents’ house and eventually away from New York, she is often reminded of Gennie, especially at moments where she is in romantic relationships with other women. In fact, Audre seems to feel comfortable for the first time since her friend’s death to talk about Gennie

when she befriends Muriel (ibid, 185). This is an important connection that bridges two overtly Maddened and pathologized femmes in Audre's life.

Audre meets Muriel, a queer white woman a few years older than her, when she moves back to New York after living in Connecticut and Mexico. Before they move in together, they exchange letters, through which Audre “[falls] into love like a stone off a cliff” (ibid, 190). Part of her falling in love with “this girl of wind and ravens” arises from Audre's desire to take care of Muriel, despite and because of her “never really believ[ing she] could do it for [herself]” (ibid). Audre and Muriel reflect aspects of each other's Madness, and this, too, forms part of their bond. They are both on the margins of a queer community that views them as “weirdos who [deserve] each other because Muriel [is] crazy and [Audre is] Black” (ibid, 208)—one example in *Zami* of an overt recognition of the entanglement of Madness and Blackness that Pickens theorizes (2019). One cannot help feeling that Audre is attempting to compensate for or redeem the guilt she feels in relation to Gennie's death through her relationship with Muriel, especially with Gennie and Muriel bearing a Mad streak that makes them Mad kin. However, Audre and Gennie's mutual experiences of racialization and anti-Black racism impart a different feeling of closeness that is not present in her relationship with Muriel.

Up to this point in her life, Audre seems to have flown under the radar of the psy scientists, even as she is medicalized and pathologized in other ways (e.g. her extreme near-sightedness, her need for foot prosthesis); by contrast, psychiatric pathologization has significantly marked Muriel's life. The violent psychiatric “care” she receives for her diagnosis of schizophrenia includes electric shock therapy, which she calls “little

deaths” that stole her memories (199). When Muriel first meets Lorde, she “talk[s] incessantly about her ‘sickness’” as a way to warn her of what could possibly happen (ibid)—that is, how Muriel might change because of her Madness—but Audre does not come to understand this until later and in the moment “[does] not heed her words as a warning” (200). To the contrary, it seems as though Audre is drawn to Muriel in part because of a desire to protect her “like a vulnerable piece of myself”; (ibid, 190). Meanwhile, their relationship does indeed prove healing to Muriel, for a time, even as it uproots her from the comfortable routine she has built for herself.

Audre is aware that there is a difference between Muriel’s Madness and her own, but Muriel is seemingly willfully unaware of the racial differences between her and Audre. For instance, as was and is not uncommon among white lesbians, Muriel equates the oppressive marginalization of lesbians to the experience of being Black in america (ibid, 203). Because of this difference and Muriel’s refusal to acknowledge it, Audre expresses that “there was one way in which [she] would always be separate” from her lover, “and it was going to be [her] own secret knowledge” and “secret pain” (ibid, 204). The knowledge of this difference will become “a weapon in [her] arsenal when the ‘time’ [comes]...to protect [herself] alone” (ibid, 204-5).

That time does come, eventually; the beginning of the end comes when Lorde’s experimentation in nonmonogamy with Muriel takes a turn she doesn’t expect. At first, things seem to be going well in the mutual romantic relationship that Audre and Muriel have with their friend Lynn, yet it soon proves to be “a beautiful vision but a difficult experiment” (ibid, 213). When Lynn realizes that she can “only [have] a piece of each of [them],” she leaves, taking Audre and Muriel’s money savings with her (ibid).

Lynn's leaving produces a shift in Audre and Muriel's relationship as they grapple with the "loss of the dream" of "this unique way of living for women, communal sex without rancor" (ibid, 213-214). Though Audre seems to refer to this "living arrangement" in casual terms ("communal sex"), she and Muriel know that they are doing something that their community does not talk about; there is no knowledge or guidance, and even if the desire is present in their community, it is an unspoken one. There is a reluctance around nonmonogamy that is made strange by the presence of infidelity in their queer community, as if infidelity in monogamous relationships is somehow preferable to genuine attempts at nonmonogamy. Audre and Muriel are pathfinders within the emotional landscape of nonmonogamy that in many ways remains unfamiliar among queer and trans communities today: references to polyamory and relationship anarchy abound, but conversations and knowledge-sharing about *how* to exist and relate outside of the parameters of (cis-heteropatriarchal) monogamy are still discussed mostly privately among close friends. Audre and Muriel seem not to make a lot of noise about their "living arrangement"; it seems that many queer women around them know but don't ask about it, even though they never "come out" as nonmonogamous.

Nonmonogamy is more commonly discussed today, yet the very real fear of being spurned and judged as promiscuous and unethical even in queer communities remains. Failure only heightens the fear that our peers will snicker and say, "We told you so."

In the midst of this experiment with nonmonogamy, Muriel is also experiencing what appears to be an actualization of her fears about giving up her job to move to New York. She appears to feel worthless and burdensome, especially when she compares herself to Audre, who appears to be accomplishing all sorts of impressive milestones

and also paying their rent (ibid, 219). Muriel develops insomnia and eventually starts hallucinating, although she does not admit this to Audre until much later (ibid, 227). As the months pass, Muriel grows more and more distant from Audre; with the distance comes not only an increase financial burden as Audre struggles to pay their rent but a psychological and emotional toll, as well.

A year after the breakup with Lynn, Muriel begins sleeping with other people. At first this is consensual between the two of them, but soon Muriel violates Audre's boundaries by sleeping with Audre's friend Jill with no prior discussion. This incident throws Audre into such extreme pain, distress, and anger that she sees red and has a spontaneous nosebleed on her hurried commute to work at the library (ibid, 232). When she gets there, it is her turn to make tea for the staff meeting. As she does, she watches almost in third person as she lifts a pot of boiling water and pours it onto her left hand, causing "the poison" of that morning's events "to run out of [her] like water" (ibid, 233). Days after she is treated in a burn clinic, she is consumed with humiliation and guilt over the "unforgivable and unmentionable act" of "[s]elf-mutilation" (ibid).

After this event, Audre does not reference it again in *Zami* nor does she unpack its significance, likely out of the shame she describes. However, this incident lends important insight into the ways that self-harm is a method of relief for intense psychic distress. Perhaps arising from the out-of-body feeling she describes, she composes her recollection in factual terms: "Almost casually, I realized what was about to happen, as if all of this was a story in some book that I had read thoroughly some time before" (ibid, 233). She is both the reader who has read the story before and the one who pours hot water on her own hand, and she is also acted upon, as if she is just a character in a

story she had read “some time before.” Here again is the blurring of the self and other and the way “I” moves between them, as well as between the “self” who harms and the “self” who is harmed. Lorde’s account reframes self-harm beyond the pathologizing narratives of the psy sciences. Although she wounds herself, it is necessary to remove the poison of her traumatizing experience; soon after she burns herself, her “piercing headaches” stop (ibid, 236). While shame attends the experience, this seemingly one-time event of “self”-“harm” also provides relief from psychic and physical pain.

After Muriel’s betrayal, Audre’s relationship with her unravels, especially as it becomes clear that the tryst with Jill was not a one-time incident. With each successive instance of Muriel cheating on Lorde, they drift farther apart, until Audre can no longer bear the “psychic discord [that is] ripping [her] brain apart” (ibid, 235). Though Audre cannot yet muster the courage to break up with Muriel, she begins “mourn[ing]” her lover “in a wildness of grief with which [she] had never mourned Gennie” (ibid, 236). She does not want to admit failure, nor can she bear the thought of “ever again attempting to connect with another human being” (ibid). Her friends appear to avoid saying “I told you so,” instead insisting: “[Y]ou know Muriel’s crazy. She’s not worth all this” (ibid, 237). Reasserting Muriel’s craziness seems to be a way of reassuring Audre that all that has come to pass is not her fault, that she tried her best. Their words seem actualized when Audre returns from visiting a friend in Detroit to find that Muriel has inadvertently killed their cats, “who had gotten into the turpentine looking for something to eat” (ibid). The seen is depressing and Maddening. Audre sees the cats’ deaths as the “the last sacrifice” (ibid, 238), a sign that their relationship is over; she is finally “tired of playing [Muriel’s] keeper” (ibid, 240). Soon after, Muriel moves out of

their apartment, and eventually Audre finds out that Muriel had “signed herself into a state hospital insulin unit” with “an experimental program for schizophrenics” (ibid, 240). There is no doubt something problematic about the desire to “fix” a Mad/disabled person, but such desire becomes complicated when person who is doing the “fixing” is also a Mad/disabled person. On the one hand, Audre appears to be acting out internalized sanism/ableism on Muriel in paternalistic ways; on the other, Audre’s hope and desire for Muriel to make it—to survive, despite the system’s best efforts—seems to come in part from the deep sense of grief and failure she feels about losing Gennie. This also mirrors her hopes and desires for herself, another Mad/disabled survivor who must also contend daily with anti-Blackness.

Enabling Black Feminist Transformation of Mad/Disability Studies

In this chapter, I have argued for a deeper engagement with the work of Audre Lorde, not only with those parts with overt references to disability but in its entirety. While *The Cancer Journals* is probably the work that has received the most engagement from Mad Studies and Disability Studies scholars, many of Lorde’s other works, including *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, *Sister Outsider*, and *The Black Unicorn*, remain undertheorized. Deeper engagement with Lorde’s oeuvre is only one part of a much larger project with which Mad Studies and Disability Studies must engage, which is to (re)center women of color feminisms as genealogical roots of our fields and scholar-activist communities. Such genealogical research helps facilitate important interventions against dominant whitestream masculinist narratives within and radically transform the work of Mad Studies and Disability Studies, as the work of Therí Alyce Pickens, Stella Bolaki, and others shows.

As I have demonstrated above, Mad Black poetic methods like scrambling force necessary confrontations in our relationships to power and language, and further examination of Lorde's theoretical and methodological contributions on these relationships is needed. What other methods for critically examining and reimagining Madness/disability lay still un(der)theorized in Lorde's oeuvre? Black crip theorist Sami Schalk exhorts us to "allow [B]lack feminist" and women of color feminist theories "to transform the field[s]" of Mad Studies and Disability Studies (2018, 4); women of color feminist theories, methods, and methodologies power our collective reimagination of the radical potential of Madness/disability, challenging whitestream assumptions that the best path forward for disabled liberation lies in humanist conceptions of personhood, agency, and the body/mind.

Chapter Four: Madness/Disability as “Spectral Presence” in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*: Confusing Hegemonic Categories Through a Mad Asian American Modality

*Content Notes: This chapter includes discussions of sanist/ableist discrimination and violence; suicide and suicidality; and anti-Asian racism. This chapter also includes quotations of sanist/ableist language from *The Woman Warrior*, including the “R-word.”⁵⁶*

“Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, to insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?”

—Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1989 [1975], 6)

“I thought every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot. Who would be It at our house? Probably me.”

—Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1989 [1975], 6)

“And I don’t want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You won’t tell me a story and then say, ‘This is a true story,’ or ‘This is just a story.’ I can’t tell the difference. I don’t even know what your real names are. I can’t tell what’s real and what you make up.”

—Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1989 [1975], 202)

Introducing Confusion

Madness/disability haunts *The Woman Warrior* in multiple ghostly forms. In this chapter, I trace multiple hauntings in Kingston’s memoir to think through the “spectral presence of disability” (Erevelles 2019, 594), the possibilities opened by

⁵⁶ Understanding that the R-word is not only offensive but deeply triggering for many disabled and disfigured people, I generally use this abbreviated version and include the full word sparingly. The full word appears on pages 162, 169, 182, and 188.

Madness-as-kinship, and how such presences shift our perception of the multiple and overlapping realities around which Kingston talks-story. In this analysis, I turn to transnational feminist disability studies scholar Nirmala Eruvelles' conceptual framework of disabled haunting as "spectral presence," by which disability both materially and discursively reveals the workings of oppressive (even disabling) forces like white supremacy, racist pathologization, and transnational capitalism which leave their traces on everyone and everything but concentrate most harmfully at the intersections of multiple marginalization (2019). I argue that "looking queerly"—as Eruvelles advocates—at these spectral presences (you can't always see them if you look straight at them) blurs lines between assumed categories, which in turn opens critical interventions on "the human." "The Human" is the conceptual foundation upon which "humanizing" approaches to Madness/disability are based (e.g. humanizing Mad/disabled people will bring them fully into the fabric of social life); such perspectives continue to hold influence in (especially whitestream) Mad/Disability Studies, limiting the radical potentialities of Madness/disability.

Of the three feminists of color whose work I engage as genealogical roots of Mad/Disability Studies, Kingston is the only who is still with us as of the writing of this dissertation. Born in Stockton, California in 1940, Kingston was raised within Stockton's emigrant and American-born Chinese community, whose linguistic and cultural influences pervade *The Woman Warrior*. As children, Kingston and her six American-born siblings, of whom she is the eldest, helped run the family laundry business started by her parents (Lee 2018). They would spend time working in the laundry before school and return at the end of the day after back-to-back sessions of

American and Chinese school (Kingston 1989). It was often while working in the laundry that her parents, in particular her mother, would talk-story to her about China, their family's previous life there, and the kin they had left behind—often leaving her to wonder what was a “true story” and what was “made up.”

The frustrations of confusion, of blurriness⁵⁷—between realities, the “past” and “present,” what is “fact” and what is “fiction”—are a motif of Kingston's work, as well as a recurrent aspect of her writing style. At various moments in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston intersperses the narrator's present in 1970s America with stories from ancient China, as well as from the late 1940s and 1950s after the communist takeover. In this way, she combines her “elliptical” stylistic approach with an ancestral storytelling technique through which she writes and talks-story of her kin across spacetime (Lee 2018, 8). These stories include one of a nameless aunt, No Name Woman, who kills herself after becoming pregnant out of wedlock, thereby bringing great shame down upon her family. She is the first of many “crazy women and girls” who haunt *The Woman Warrior* (1989, 186).

While doing research for this chapter, I read many book reviews of Asian American feminist writer Maxine Hong Kingston's work, both academic and those written by everyday readers. Although her books continue to be popular (evinced by their inclusion in recent “must-read” lists⁵⁸), their reception is mixed, to put it mildly.

⁵⁷ As I discuss below, my conceptualization of “blurriness” extends from literary scholar Yen Li Loh's observation that Maxine's aunts, No Name Woman and Moon Orchid, blur categorical distinctions between the criterion used to define the human (e.g. rationality) against “inhumanness” (e.g. insanity or “ghostliness”) (2018).

⁵⁸ For example, Laura Sirikul's “25 Amazing Books by Asian American and Pacific Islander Authors You Need to Read” features *The Woman Warrior* in its top ten must-reads (2019); Hua Hsu includes *The Woman Warrior* in his article “The Asian-American Canon Breakers” (2019).

Since its publication in 1975, Kingston's memoir *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* has received both praise and intense criticism. Some of its harshest critics include Asian American reviewers who express feeling betrayed by the inauthenticity which they claim marks Kingston's storying of Chinese and Chinese American cultures, accusing her of seeking to "appeal to a white readership" (Hsu 2019).⁵⁹ The other side of the coin includes white critics and other outsiders who seem to feel cheated that Kingston's memoir does not reveal or clarify Chinese and Chinese American cultures for them; "Just wasn't my cup of tea," one such vexed reviewer writes (Amazon reviewer 2014).

Many readers describe the experience of reading *The Woman Warrior* as a confusing one. "Too much likeness is shared between the writer and the characters in the story," another review asserts, "and the reader should be aware of who the story is speaking of at all times so as not to get lost in the fiction of the ancient stories" ("Anciently Ageless Book" Nook Reviewer 2011). White eurowestern readers seem particularly confused by *The Woman Warrior*, troubled by its inability to tell a straight story, by the way "the past and the present seem to morph into one story" (ibid). I wonder if Kingston ever sees these reviews, if they make her chuckle.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Edward Iwata's article "Is it a clash over writing..." (1990) for more context for criticism of *The Woman Warrior*, especially writer and literary critic Frank Chin's perception of and relationship to Maxine Hong Kingston.

⁶⁰ In her contribution to *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue*, Kingston recounts, "When reading most of the reviews and critical analyses of *The Woman Warrior*, I have two reactions: I want to pat those critics on their backs, and I also giggle helplessly, shaking my head. (Helpless giggles turn less frequently into sobs as one gets older)" (1982, 55).

In her essential overview of Kingston's life and work, *Understanding Maxine Hong Kingston*, Asian American Studies scholar Julia H. Lee discusses her experiences of teaching Kingston in her undergraduate classes:

Having taught Kingston over the years to legions of undergraduates, I know that the experience of reading her texts can be both exhilarating and confusing. Students almost always struggle initially to understand the plot of the texts, the relationship between characters and what motivates them, as well as the shifts between fact, fiction, and fantasy that so often characterizes Kingston's work. (2018, 8)

Identifying connections between the often-confusing experience of reading Kingston's work and the productive ways in which such confusion troubles the boundaries between assumed categories, Lee continues:

Once [students] have become accustomed to Kingston's elliptical writing style, they begin to appreciate how she questions almost all of the things that they had previously held to be irrefutable or factual: that there is a hard line between fiction and truth, that the history we learn in textbooks is a representative history of the nation, that the United States embraces its status as a nation of immigrants, and that race and gender have no impact on how one is treated or perceived in the United States. To put it simply, Kingston's work is all about breaking down the binaries that govern our lives and rule our interpretations of almost everything. (ibid, 8-9)

Both Kingston and *The Woman Warrior's* narrator Maxine would surely empathize with this experience of confusion, albeit for different reasons.⁶¹ I speculate that Kingston's use of confusion as a literary and theoretical method grows out of her early experiences of confusion as a child attempting to parse the "peculiarities" of her

⁶¹ In this chapter, when the narrator of Kingston's memoir is speaking, I will refer to her as Maxine to mark places where Kingston is writing from a child's or young adult's point of view. Although Kingston draws extensively on her own and her community's lived experiences for the content of *The Woman Warrior*, she does not entirely conflate herself with Maxine, as when she refers to Maxine in the third person as "the narrator" (Kingston 2016).

family “from what is Chinese” (as she writes in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter). Whereas the young Maxine experiences confusion as a conflicting, mystifying, often frustrating atmosphere that permeates her childhood and especially her interactions with her parents, Kingston’s use of confusion as a method suggests a coming to terms with those early confusing experiences in a way that recuperates the generative potential of confusion to confront and dismantle the “single story” of hegemonic power. *The Woman Warrior*, then, possibly represents a form of reconciliation with the power of confusion as both a modality and method for interrogating and “making sense of” reality, especially the coexistence of multiple truths and realities. Engaging confusion in this way enables Kingston to tell her own story, which at times disagrees with or disobeys familial (instructive) narratives while also honoring her family’s and culture’s stories. For Maxine, there is an incongruence between her family encouraging her to be obedient and also to speak up, to prepare to be a good wife while also listening to their talk-story from which she gleaned that Chinese girls “failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen” (1989, 19). When she grows up, Maxine realizes she “had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story” (ibid, 19-20). As a writer, Kingston embraces the power of talking-story as a non-linear and entwined personal, familial, and ancestral storytelling technique which she manifests on the pages of *The Woman Warrior* through a blending of writing styles, such as lyrical prose, comedic dialogue, and narrative fantasy. Asian American literature scholar Lan Dong asserts that “talking-

story”⁶² represents Kingston’s invention of a cultural form through which she “reshapes the ‘talk-stories’ based on her mother’s tales, the Chinese American community’s anecdotes, cultural memory, and her own experience of growing up with a bicultural heritage” (2011, 201n.3).

Maxine the narrator would empathize with confusion because this textures her day-to-day life, from taking her parents’ “jokes” literally to deducing that a special Chinese holiday is underway not because she is told as much but because her mother lays a special place setting at the dinner table. Confusion also manifests in the transitions between spacetimes, such as going from American school to Chinese school, each with their different structures and expectations. Confusion mingles with secrets, as well, as when her mother talks-story about some family topics but not others, omitting certain aspects based on some criteria that remains mysterious to Maxine. As the third epigraph above discusses, the young Maxine accuses her parents of “[lying] with stories” (Kingston 1989, 202); she is confounded by their refusal to confirm for her “what’s real and what [they] make up” (ibid). Her parents, especially her mother, give no quarter; somehow Maxine’s inability to tell the difference is her own fault. ““You’re always believing talk-story”” (ibid, 183) her mother accuses her, ““You’re always believing what those Ghost Teachers tell you”” (ibid, 169). Her parents guilt her for being too gullible. Her mother turns Maxine’s outraged accusations back on her: “Can’t you take a joke? You can’t even tell a joke from real life. You’re not so smart. Can’t even tell real from false” (ibid, 202).

⁶² Like a reflection of the fact that Kingston wrote *The Woman Warrior* while living in Hawai’i, Dong notes that Kingston’s use of “talk-story” as a form “combines the Chinese folk genre of storytelling and the Hawaiian pidgin phrase in street language” (2011, 201n.3).

While there are many examples of scholar-activist discussion on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde in Disability Studies, there is much less so on Maxine Hong Kingston's work. That could in part be owing to Anzaldúa and Lorde's more visible disabilities or the perception of Kingston as Mad-but-not-disabled or even as altogether nondisabled. Although how Kingston identifies with Madness as a positionality is blurry, Maxine is called crazy throughout *The Woman Warrior*, especially by her family, and she frames the white supremacist hegemonic culture of the US as crazy-making. Confusion and craziness especially arise where the stories of her emigrant and American-born Chinese community clash with those of eurowestern colonial hegemonic reality.

From reading her memoir alone, readers might perceive Kingston as a Mad/disabled person. She stories the narrator as Mad/disabled in various ways, as I discuss below, and Maxine is frequently interpellated as "crazy" by other characters. Her craziness is often tangible in moments of confusion in *The Woman Warrior*, which manifest as friction, such as between Maxine and her mother, Brave Orchid. Maxine is constantly failing to act "normal" enough by her family's standards, which are often unclear to her. She is encouraged to speak clearly and loudly but is told that if she is not demure, no man will want to marry her. Maxine clearly gets her predilection for daydreaming from her mother, whose only opportunity to indulge in her inner world is while starching shirts at the laundry when most of the kids are away. As soon as Maxine interrupts her mother's daydreaming, suddenly Brave Orchid wants Maxine to be quiet: "I can't stand this whispering...Senseless gabbings every night. I wish you would stop. Go away and work. Whispering, whispering, making no sense. Madness. I don't feel

like hearing your craziness” (1989, 200). Being called crazy, especially by her family, is a regular occurrence for the young Maxine. However, I turn to Kingston’s work not because she clearly positions herself as Mad/disabled but because her writing confuses (categories, definitions of) disability. By “confuse,” from the Latin “confundere” (mingle together), I mean in the 1550s sense of the word to “mix or mingle things or ideas so as to render the elements indistinguishable” (Etymonline 2019, n.p.). I read Kingston’s references to and discussions of disability in *The Woman Warrior* not as attempts to clarify and categorize who is disabled and who is abled but as ways of confusing those definitions, categorizations, pathologizations. Specifically, regarding her writing on/around disability, this “confusion” may be unintentional on her part, but it is in keeping with her tactic of confusing other boundaries, distinctions, and meanings throughout *The Woman Warrior*.

Maxine is made kin through blood to the crazy women and girls of her extended family, and through Madness she is kin to all outcast, scorned, and abandoned women across China and the Chinese diaspora. These kin including living and dead relatives, such as her mother and her aunts No Name Woman and Moon Orchid; Mad/disabled neighbors like Crazy Mary, “whose family were Christian converts” (Kingston 1989, 186), and the witch Pee-A-Nah, who chases Maxine’s little sister so that she “[has] to be chanted out of her screaming” (1989, 189); and ancient heroines like Fa Mu Lan. It is to their willfully forgotten stories that Maxine so often turns in talking-story about her own life, sensing their similarities, even when she does not want to admit it. “I thought every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl,” she reflects in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, dreading that she is “It” in her own family’s household.

Perhaps being “It” is the source of her ability to speculate on the fate of her aunt No Name Woman or to live the story of Fa Mu Lan from far across spacetime.

Confusion and Blurring (and) Perception in *The Woman Warrior*

Maxine’s mother sings and talks-story to her as a little girl, inspiring her with heroic tales of a woman warrior. These tales are based on the legend of Fa Mu Lan, a brave young woman in ancient China who disguises herself as a man and takes her aging father’s place when he is drafted for war. The legend of this woman warrior is thought to have first appeared in China between the fourth and sixth centuries in the form of song, later written down in narrative poetry as the “Ballad of Mulan” during the thirteenth century (Dong 2010, 2). Joining her own version of Fa Mu Lan’s tale with those sung to her by her mother, Kingston participates in a long tradition of storying Mu Lan as an “ideal heroine” (ibid), “transform[ing] the folk heroine into a Chinese American woman warrior and avenger whose image is enriched through a bicultural legacy and a conscious search for female empowerment” (ibid, 3). Mu Lan represents an aspirational figure for Maxine: a woman who is talented, independent, sure of herself, who leaves home to develop herself and returns to be honored by her family.

In the second chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, “White Tigers,” a bird leads the child Fa Mu Lan away from her village and into the mountains, where she meets two ancient and magical entities in the guise of an old man and an old woman. They train her to become an exceptional warrior who will seek justice for the common folk of China, who have been neglected by the emperor. After fifteen years, she returns to her village and recruits an army to confront the emperor with the people’s grievances. So

begins the many adventures and military victories of Fa Mu Lan, a woman warrior honored by her family, her village, and all of China.

Maxine's story could not be more different: "My American life has been such a disappointment," she says (1989, 45). Unlike Mu Lan, who is cherished by her family and honored by her soldiers for both her "feminine" and "masculine" qualities, Maxine often expresses feelings of anger, alienation, and confusion about being what she extrapolates is variously "too much" or "not enough" of something, stemming from often conflicting expectations from mainland Chinese, Chinese diasporic, and whitestream American cultures. On the one hand, her parents expect to her to become someone (though who, exactly, seems hard to pinpoint from Maxine's perspective); on the other, her relatives seem innately disappointed simply by the fact of Maxine's being a girl. "From afar I can believe my family loves me fundamentally," she explains, "They only say, 'When fishing for treasures in the flood, be careful not to pull in girls,' because that is what one says about daughters. But I watched such words come out of my own mother's and father's mouths" (1989, 52). Although she eventually becomes a successful writer in adulthood who "wrap[s her] American successes around [her] like a private shawl" (1989, 52), as a child and teen she can only hope to escape what she perceives as her parents' disappointment, "to grow up a woman warrior" (1989, 20). She seeks escapism from her day-to-day through her imagination and what she refers to as "mind-movies" (1989, 203). "[T]here were adventurous people inside my head to whom I talked," she reveals, pondering if this makes her the "crazy girl" of the family, even as she searches for an omen like the bird that leads Fa Mu Lan to her heroic destiny (1989, 203).

Maxine recounts a day when she momentarily believes she has encountered such a miracle: “I’ve looked for the bird. . . . Once at a beach after a long hike I saw a seagull, tiny as an insect. But when I jumped up to tell what miracle I saw, before I could get the words out I understood that the bird was insect-size because it was far away. My brain had momentarily lost its depth perception. I was that eager to find an unusual bird” (1989, 49). This loss of depth perception seems deceptive and yet enables a different kind of perception, one capable of bringing different realities into focus, even the magical or the miraculous. As different depths of realities move in and out of focus, blending and blurring (with) one another, alternative ways of “seeing” open up.

In my analysis of four characters whose spectral presence haunts her memoir—No Name Woman, Moon Orchid, the “retarded boy,” and the “quiet girl”—I feel for the blurred edges between my own Mad reading and the Mad(dening) reading experience Kingston offers in *The Woman Warrior* to examine the ways in which she generatively confuses supposedly stable eurowestern categories of meaning, particularly categorizations and meanings of Madness/disability.⁶³ My intention in this chapter is not to pin down what is “real” and what is “fantasy” in Kingston’s writing but to shift my perception—to allow her work to blur my perception—in order to engage the spectral presence of disability with/in her memoir.⁶⁴ As I discuss in the following

⁶³ Yen Li Loh also notes that previous scholarship argues for reading *The Woman Warrior* as Kingston’s subversion of “notions of cultural stability and purity” (2018, 2011), such that Kingston’s blurring of Madness/disability cannot be read separately from her blurrings of “authenticity” and “reality” in regards to Chinese and Chinese American cultures.

⁶⁴ Kingston alludes to a modality/method of confusion in the first epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. Her enactment of a Mad Asian American modality holds in tension multiple realities/possibilities. Holding ancestral ghost stories in tension with the hegemonic reality of the US, Maxine, like her American-born peers, strives to understand how she and her community “[fit] in solid America” (1989, 5). Confusing the boundaries between “[w]hat is Chinese tradition and what is the

section, Kingston enacts “confusion” as a Mad Asian American modality through which to perceive multiple realities simultaneously and to subvert “the enemy” (1989, 48): white supremacy, eurowestern imperialism, transnational capitalism, and other interlocking systems of oppression, “business-suited in their modern American executive guise” (ibid).

While the young narrator of *The Woman Warrior* repeatedly expresses frustration with her family’s evasive talk-story traditions, Kingston must have come around to her parents’ ways of thinking, for she engages this ancestral storytelling technique of blurring the boundary between “the real” and “the imaginal.” As mentioned above, some critics have accused her of lacking authenticity or not telling the “truth” about Chinese culture by including these blurrings or by not making it clear what is truth versus fiction. I read the use of this technique as a choice she makes to unsettle singular or fixed concepts of meaning, authenticity, and truth. In an interview with Kingston, journalist Bill Moyers asks her, “Isn’t there a danger that your reader doesn’t know if your stories are true or not, that we are required to decide whether the story...is fact or fiction?” (Kingston 1990, 16:03) Kingston replies, “Of course I should put burdens [on] readers, and I should give them challenges. Readers already have this burden. Say they’re not even readers. All human beings have this burden of life to constantly figure out what’s true, what’s authentic, what’s meaningful, and what’s dross, what’s a hallucination, what’s a figment, and what’s madness” (ibid, 16:15).

movies” disrupts racist eurowestern hegemonic stories about “authenticity” and by extension “reality” (1989, 6).

From a eurowestern standpoint, it is easy to draw a line between truth and authenticity on the one hand, and hallucination and madness on the other. *The Woman Warrior* refutes such a clear delineation; even as Maxine calls her parents' stories "lies," she also values them and continually ponders and pursues their meanings for her own life. The mad and the meaningful are frequently blurred together, entangled. *The Woman Warrior* is evidence that Kingston values the meanings and even the disturbances that gendered and racialized madnnesses create, as her memoir revolves around the stories of crazy emigrant and American-born Chinese women and girls, the challenges that they pose to her own meaning-making. Kingston identifies "this burden of life" as a necessary one that all people must acknowledge, and an aspect of her "challenge" in *The Woman Warrior* is to force readers out of the comfort of clear and stable meaning or "truth," to share Maxine's dis/quiet and confusion. Perhaps most of all, Kingston wants to disturb White Ghosts, about whom her parents offer this guidance:

Lie to Americans. Tell them you were born during the San Francisco earthquake. Tell them your birth certificate and your parents were burned up in the fire. Don't report crimes; tell them we have no crimes and no poverty. Give a new name every time you get arrested; the ghosts won't recognize you. Pay the new immigrants twenty-five cents an hour and say we have no unemployment. And, of course, tell them we're against Communism. Ghosts have no memory anyway and poor eyesight. (Kingston 1989, 185)

With this advice, Maxine's parents succinctly describe the interactions of anti-Asian racist, xenomistic, and anti-immigrant surveillance and policing; the façade of capitalist abundance and the american dream; and the willful forgetting of the settler

whitestream.⁶⁵ White Ghost readers can rebuff such descriptions of untrustworthiness all they want, but the effectiveness of her parents' and community's strategies remains.

While her parents' goal in talking-story in a blurry or elusive manner may have been to evade ghosts and agents of the US settler state, Kingston's goal is not necessarily to appear evasive or elusive but rather to direct attention to the elusiveness of stable categories of meaning. As I discuss below, her Mad(dened) ancestral storytelling throws into question the stability and separateness of the categories of space and time, fact and fiction, fantasy and reality, self and Other. At the same time, this matters materially because discourse impacts matter: Kingston says that part of her reason for developing a peculiar writing style for *The Woman Warrior* arose from the need to protect the identities of undocumented people in her Chinese emigrant community (Ng and Kingston 2019). Further, by drawing readers' attention to cracks in "Reality's" facade—causing us to realize that there is not only one reality—Kingston motivates us to take action to change material reality. In other words, this is not a one-way causal relationship; matter can affect discourse and discourse can affect matter. In an interview with Alexis Cheung, Kingston clarifies the power of art and other forms of discourse to transform collective reality:

[A]ll the reviews [of *The Woman Warrior*] were like "What is this? Is this fiction or nonfiction?" But I like that question. I really enjoy answering it because the latest edition of *The Woman Warrior*, on the front cover it says, "Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction," and then you turn the book over and on the back it says "Fiction." It shows that there isn't a wall between fiction and nonfiction — that the borders and the margins are

⁶⁵ My understanding of "willful forgetting" comes from Native feminist Paula Gunn Allen, who asserts that "Indians think it is important to remember, while Americans believe it is important to forget" (1992 [1986], 210). For more about willful forgetting, see the work of Charles Mills (2017) and Sharene Razack (1999).

very wide — and that we could live in that wide border, that wide margin. I’m for making the borders very wide in art. I hope it could happen politically, thinking about immigration and building the wall, too. (2016, n.p.)

Kingston’s confusions of eurowestern colonial hegemonic reality empower interventions on several harmful concepts underpinning that reality, such as the hard line drawn between truth and fiction, designated by colonial studies scholar Walter Dignolo as “Truth without parenthesis” (2011, 70). Her questioning and confusing of stable categories of being and relation in turn enable interrogation of the Human, the category upon which the ongoing projects of white supremacist capitalist settler colonialism and imperialism are based. Destabilizing the category of the Human calls into question the desire to “humanize” disabled people commonly expressed by disability rights groups for whom the full and equitable inclusion of disabled people in everyday (read: normative) life is the primary objective.⁶⁶ In other words, their goal is integrating disabled people into social life and its structures—schooling, religious practice, work, marriage and family, electoral politics—rather than questioning the white supremacist capitalist colonialism through which those structures are constituted. After all, as Tanya Titchkosky explains, “[t]he human becomes those who not only interprets the edges of humanity but can also participate in drawing the line of division between human and non-human,” which the very project of attempting to bring disabled people (or any group of people) under the rubric of “humanness” enacts (2014, 128).

⁶⁶ For example, the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) names as its goal the “[promotion of] equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation” for disabled Americans—excuse me, Americans with disabilities (AAPD 2021). For further discussion on the uses of humanization discourse in relation to disability rights and the ‘humanity’ of disabled people, see Tanya Titchkosky’s chapter “Monitoring Disability: The Question of the ‘Human’ in Human Rights Project” (2014).

Mignolo discusses the distinction between “human” and “non-” or “not-quite-human” in terms of “humanitas” and “anthropos,” in which humanitas (the eurowest) exert their “managerial authority to assert themselves by disqualifying those who...are classified as deficient, rationally and ontologically,” presenting anthropos (the non- or not-quite-human) with two choices: “to assimilate or to be cast out” (2011, 82). The distinction between humanitas and anthropos—as defined by humanitas, themselves—is intrinsically racialized, because “[r]ational classification meant racial classification” (ibid, 83). Anthropos constitutes humanitas’ literal difference and refers not only to “native barbarians” but also to “the communist, the terrorist, all those who can be placed in the axis of evil, and those who are friends with the Devil,” including “illegal immigrants” and queer people (ibid, 85). To this excluded list I add disabled people, particularly given that disability is intrinsically racialized within the context of the Middle Passage and the eurowestern invasion of and genocide against Indigenous peoples in the Americas (Erevelles 2011; Erevelles 2019).

The process of drawing lines between “human and non-human” to which Titchkosky and Mignolo speak is a deeply racialized project. As Black Studies scholars have argued, “humanness” is constructed against Blackness under white supremacist settler colonialism (Spillers 1987; Wilderson III 2010; Wynter 2003). Sylvia Wynter explains how “the human” and “Man”—meaning white cis-masculine—came to be conflated via eurowestern Enlightenment in the 16th and 17th centuries (2003). Sabrina Strings historicizes this conflation, describing the evolution of eurowestern understandings of and investments in whiteness, which occurred in part by expanding upon existing racial categories, scientifically investigating and codifying them, and

instilling them with value-laden assessments (2019).⁶⁷ The imperative to imagine beyond inclusion via normative modes of “being human” resides in interrogating the racist and sanist/ableist nature of the eurowestern construction of “the human.” Along with other women of color feminist scholarship, Kingston’s work urges me to imagine beyond neoliberal, whitestream frameworks of “inclusion” that perceive Mad/disabled people as part of the social order only to the degree that we can meet normative standards of family, productivity, sociality/collegiality, and so on.

Kingston points to the uses of discourse in upsetting universal categories of meaning, such as “truth” and “authenticity,” and I argue that this importantly extends to “the human”—and at the same time she is pointing out the limits of discourse. Erevelles argues that “discursive interventions while conceptually powerful are not effective in transforming the real material conditions of those who live under oppressive social, political, and economic conditions at the intersections of difference” (2019, 599). Kingston hints at the limits of discourse when she explains that her “confusing” writing style in *The Woman Warrior* is in part motivated by a desire to protect the identities of undocumented immigrants in her community (Ng and Kingston 2019)—that is, discourse might bring these stories into a white/mainstream american imagination, but this does not necessarily translate to material benefits; in fact, there are obvious material consequences (e.g. surveillance, incarceration, deportation) from which Kingston tries to shield the real people in *The Woman Warrior*. She enacts this protective move

⁶⁷ For instance, Strings examines how eurowestern armchair anthropologists like Bernier and Diderot developed racial classification systems to rationalize the superiority of some (read: white) races over others (2019). Through their scientific and social processes, Blackness came to be conflated with stupidity, laziness, gluttony, and other negative traits and whiteness with intelligence, rationality, and energetic productiveness.

discursively, such as by changing names, omitting dates or locations, and so on. Below I seek to trouble a clear delineation between “discourse” and “matter” by extrapolating the blurriness of these two categories as demonstrated by Kingston’s expression of a Mad Asian American modality in *The Woman Warrior*.

Kingston’s expression of a Mad Asian American modality threatens the assumed cohesion of “the human” by confusing its constituent parts (e.g. rationality and “the self”). By troubling eurowestern conceptualizations of rationality and “the self” as definable features of the human, this modality confuses eurowestern hegemonic meanings of Madness/disability that attach them to individual body/minds.⁶⁸ If, per this Mad Asian American mode of engaging, Madness/disability is something (a quality, an experience, a modality, a sensation) that exceeds the individual bodymind, then Madness/disability is also interwoven with community; the implications of Mad/disabled scholarship-activism must account for this interconnectivity when addressing the material implications of oppression upon Mad/disabled people. Per its enactment in *The Woman Warrior*, a Mad Asian American modality demonstrates that individually experienced sanist/ableist oppression cannot be understood or addressed apart from the systems of power in which they are embedded. In this way, Kingston’s memoir anticipates the political/relational model of disability theorized by Disability Studies scholar Alison Kafer, in which Madness/disability is defined, experienced, and politicized relationally (e.g. in relation to time, environments, other people) (2013).

I read Kingston’s Mad Asian American modality as primarily enacted through her storying of Mad/disabled characters in *The Woman Warrior*, including Maxine, her

⁶⁸ Here I use a slash mark to indicate the separation of body from mind in Cartesian duality.

relatives, her classmates, and other people in her community. In particular, assumed categories of Madness/disability, humanness, and the self are blurred by the spectral presence of those Kingston identifies as “crazy women and girls” (1989, 186), who manifest as ghostly figures blurring, transgressing, and confusing the bounds between human and “inhuman” (Loh 2018). Below I turn to close readings of four of these characters: Maxine’s aunts, No Name Woman and Moon Orchid; and her classmates, “the quiet girl,” and “the retarded boy.”

Ghosts and the Specter of Madness/Disability: Haunting as a Methodological Framework

My approach to haunting is informed by Nirmala Erevelles’ theorization of the ways in which “disability haunts discourses of difference by working with and against memory” (2019, 594). Drawing upon Saidiya Hartman’s monograph *Scenes of Subjection* and Eve Tuck’s article “Suspending Damage,” Erevelles turns to “that ‘terrible spectacle’...of slavery” and colonial genocide to theorize “the spectral presence of disability” at the intersections of multiple marginalization (ibid). Theorizing the ongoing impacts of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and settler colonialism, she asserts that “both disability/impairment and race are neither merely biological nor wholly discursive, but rather are historical materialist constructs imbricated within the exploitative conditions of transnational capitalism” (ibid, 602). From this historical materialist perspective, she pushes back on the “search [for] more empowering narratives that nevertheless recreate limiting theorizations of the human/posthuman that being discursive do little to transform the material conditions for those living at the

intersections of difference” (ibid). Although I do not take up her use of Hartman’s “scenes of subjection,” which is highly specific to ongoing histories of slavery and anti-Black violence, I join her in turning towards the specter of disability, in this case where Mad/disabled specters appear in *The Woman Warrior*. Erevelles warns against a metaphorical approach to thinking through meanings of disability and powerfully argues for a historical material approach to theorizing the radical potential of disability, asserting that movements for disabled liberation and Disability Justice should be seeking and enacting transformative practices that have a meaningful impact on the material realities of disabled people (605).

While I read Erevelles as taking ghosts and hauntings seriously, she primarily engages them in a metaphorical sense. Following Kingston’s blurry approach to discourse—and by extension, ghosts—as concept not entirely separable from materiality, I look for metaphors in the ghosts that haunt *The Woman Warrior* and also extend my analysis of the spectral to the literal, for both literal and metaphorical ghosts are present in her memoirs—and in fact, they are often both at the same time, or otherwise blur the distinction between the literal and metaphorical. This interpretation of ghosts draws from literary scholar Yen Li Loh’s theorization of Maxine’s aunts No Name Woman and Moon Orchid as Mad feminine inhabitants of the “inhuman,” which she articulates as a liminal space between (rational) humanness and (Mad) ghostliness (2010). She argues that their presence in *The Woman Warrior* marks critiques of human exceptionalism at the intersections of race, gender, and immigration, wherein “inhuman, ghostly figures can productively create a nonhuman framework that expands notions of Asian Americanist political and ethical belonging by *blurring the boundaries between*

rationality and madness, the human and the ghostly” (2018, 210, emphasis mine). Loh’s analysis of these “blurrings” is instructive for understanding the ways ghostliness, in/humanness, and Madness/disability are interacting in Kingston’s enactment of a Mad Asian American modality in *The Woman Warrior*. In grappling with both metaphorical and literal meanings of ghosts and their entanglement with gendered and racialized Madness, I think Erevelles’ historical materialist perspective on haunting together with Loh’s conceptualization of *The Woman Warrior*’s Mad women as “inhuman ghosts” whose presence enacts “a critique of the systemic inequalities on both sides of the pond: of the legal exclusion of the Chinese by the American state, and of the Chinese patriarchal kinship structure that placed the burden of household labor on women” (2018, 231). This lens of inhuman ghostliness resonates with Kingston’s Mad Asian American modality in that it confuses the rubric of “the human” prescribed by eurowestern worldview, blurring (the lines between) the assumed categories of the ghostly/the material, discourse/matter, self/Other, human/nonhuman.

Madness and/as Haunting: Moon Orchid and No Name Woman

Ghosts abound in Kingston’s work, especially in *The Woman Warrior*, for whose presence we are primed with the subtitle *Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. Existing on both sides of the Pacific and throughout time, the ghosts narrated by the young Maxine take on mysterious form and function. Sometimes ghosts are sad and pitiful, such as Wall Ghosts, whose “real state” is “weak and sad humanity” (Kingston 1989, 72). Some ghosts are angry and vengeful, like No Name Woman, Maxine’s aunt whose name is expunged from familial memory, or the Sitting Ghost who Brave Orchid exorcizes from the women’s dorm at midwifery school (1989, 75).

Ghosts are not always the spirits of the dead but can take the form of the ghostly living whose souls get frightened out of their bodyminds and cannot be chanted back, as happens with Crazy Mary and Moon Orchid, both of whom end up permanently “locked up in the crazyhouse” (1989, 187). Most Americans are ghosts, identified by their occupation (Suitcase Inspector Ghost; Meter Reader Ghost; Delivery Ghost) or other characteristics: Brave Orchid writes “Noisy Red-Mouth Ghost” on the laundry package of a particularly rude American Ghost, “marking its clothes with its name” (1989, 105). Sometimes Maxine’s family specifies “White Ghosts,” “Black Ghosts,” “Mexican Ghosts” among the nameless rabble of ghosts hanging around California.

In this section, I examine Kingston’s storying of No Name Woman and Moon Orchid as ghostly presences who embody “the specter of disability”—specifically Madness—in *The Woman Warrior* to analyze Kingston’s formulation of Madness-as-kinship across spacetime. No Name Woman and Moon Orchid are Maxine’s paternal and maternal aunts, respectively. Whereas Moon Orchid lives with Maxine’s family for a time, Maxine is denied the chance to meet No Name Woman except as a ghost. When the narrator is young, her mother tells her the story of a forgotten paternal aunt back in mainland China, who becomes pregnant from an affair with another man while her husband is away. The shame of her transgression is so great that even her name is effaced from familial memory. The narrator stories her mother’s purpose in telling her American-born daughters this story:

Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. She tested our strength to establish realities. Those in the emigrant generations who could not reassert brute survival died young and far from home. Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure

out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America. (1989, 5)

Brave Orchid's talk-story about No Name Woman apparently serves a protective function for her daughters, but Maxine seems to relate to her aunt not as a warning so much as Mad kin—No Name Woman represents another crazy girl in their family. Of her ghostly presence Kingston writes,

My aunt haunts me—her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes. I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute. (1989, 16).

No Name Woman is crazy in the context of her Chinese village, which views her affair and subsequent illegitimate pregnancy as deeply violating of Chinese cisheteropatriarchal norms. The villagers, “probably men and women [they] knew well” (1989, 4), come to their family's house the night No Name Woman gives birth. Disguised in masks or hiding their faces behind their hair, they destroy Maxine's family's crops, slaughter their animals, tear their rice in the fields, and smash their household belongs, particularly those of No Name Woman. Filled with shame, No Name Woman throws herself, along with her newborn, into the family well, where she is found the next morning by her sister-in-law, the narrator's mother (1989, 5).

Though she recognizes there is a danger in “telling on” her aunt, Maxine's transgression of secrecy also suggests that there is power and perhaps healing in storying the relationality of Madness-as-kinship across spacetime. Unlike her mother, Maxine does not make No Name Woman into “a story to grow up on” (1989, 5), but

empathizes with her by expanding on Brave Orchid's version of events. It may be that she feels some responsibility or even entitlement to talk-story about No Name Woman, whom she calls her "forerunner" (1989, 8). No Name Woman's extramarital pregnancy "cursed the year, the family, the village, and herself" (1989, 10). She imagines several possibilities that could have created the circumstances of No Name Woman's pregnancy: perhaps she was a victim of rape by someone in her village, or perhaps she was in love. Imagining No Name Woman as an impassioned sexual agent "doesn't fit," according to Maxine. She explains, "I don't know any women like that, or men either. Unless I see [No Name Woman's] life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help" (1989, 8). Even so, she tries to imagine this possibility, and the implications of No Name Woman enjoying the attention she received, even if it resulted in "a reputation for eccentricity" (1989, 9): "At the mirror my aunt combed individuality into her bob" (ibid). In this way, Maxine tries not to story her aunt's life as pure tragedy; she imagines the fleeting joy and closeness that No Name Woman experiences with her newborn, even as she realizes that neither of them has a future. Maxine knows what happens next; anticipating the listener who condemns No Name Woman for taking her child with her, Maxine says, "[c]arrying the baby to the well shows loving" (1989, 15).

Through her imagination, Maxine forms a kind of relationship with her aunt and at the same time contextualizes No Name Woman's death within forces of misogyny, filial piety, and heteropatriarchal expectations. These imaginings reveal that it was not some individual madness that drove No Name Woman to drown herself and her child in the family well but the alienating and quite possibly violent circumstances of No Name Woman's relationship with the father of her child, who is himself unnamed in *The*

Woman Warrior. Kingston's relational storytelling of No Name Woman's ghostly presence makes salient the necessity of embedding Mad "individuals" (or their "mad choices") within relationships to family, community, and forces of systemic power. While the forces of systemic power working in Maxine's family's ancestral village are very different from those working in her American hometown of Stockton, her stories relationally trace crazy women to show how their spectral presence reveals the workings of power at different points in spacetime. Further, Madness-as-kinship sustains Maxine as a young Chinese American girl who experiences intense disappointment about her American life and its attendant experiences of oppression at the intersections of race, gender, Madness, language, and nationality.

Maxine's relationship with her aunt Moon Orchid, Brave Orchid's sister, is very different from that with No Name Woman; they have the chance to be in each other's presence, to share meals and talk-story. This ability to share spacetime is made possible through immigration, but immigrating to the US also seems to trigger the series of events that madden Moon Orchid. Yen Li Loh discusses the ways that Chinese emigrant women in America are subject to dehumanizing Eurowestern colonial exoticization, marginalization, and (legal, social) exclusion arising from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and broader histories of Asian immigrant exclusion in the US (2018). These histories draw attention to how notions of citizenship and legible humanity are entangled in white supremacist settler colonialism, as well as to "notions of human exceptionalism that have defined racial Others as lacking the language, law, and rationality deemed necessary for national belonging" (2018, 210). Along with the more personal aspects of her family's treatment of her as a kind of Other—especially Brave

Orchid's attempts to reform Moon Orchid in light of her "failed" marriage—these broader racialized and gendered notions of humanity also shape Moon Orchid's experiences of Madness as a Chinese emigrant woman.

Brave Orchid helps Moon Orchid immigrate to the US so that she can live with her daughter, who has married a Chinese American man. However, Brave Orchid has an ulterior motive: she wants Moon Orchid to confront her husband, who Brave Orchid perceives has abandoned her. Moon Orchid's husband has been living in the US for thirty years already, sending money back to his wife and daughter in China for "all the food and clothes and servants [they have] ever wanted," even sending their daughter to college (Kingston 1989, 125). Meanwhile, he has started a second family in the US, where he has another daughter and two sons. All Moon Orchid wants is to see her daughter and her grandchildren, but Brave Orchid is insistent that she try to take what is hers by right as Big Wife (i.e. first wife). Moon Orchid pleads to drop the subject, and so Brave Orchid acquiesces for a time, letting her sister stay with her family while trying to "toughen [Moon Orchid] up" (1989, 127).

During this time, Maxine and her siblings get to know their "eccentric" aunt, especially in terms of the differences between mainland and diasporic Chinese cultures. However, their aunt's eccentricities are also peculiar to her; she is soft and fragile, which Brave Orchid seems to interpret as an outcome of Moon Orchid not having to work, let alone struggle. Rather than casting out her husband's second wife, Moon Orchid entertains the possibility that they could become friends, prompting Brave Orchid to think "her sister wasn't very bright, and she had not gotten any smarter in the last thirty years" (1989, 130). This fragility proves to be the undoing of Moon Orchid's

american life, whose access to consensual reality already seems tenuous. When Brave Orchid takes her sister along to the family laundry, Moon Orchid cannot complete any of the tasks she is given, seemingly overwhelmed by new things—her “savage” nieces and nephews, direct and unmannered (1989, 140); the hard work of the laundry; the strangeness of Gold Mountain (1989, 137). Moon Orchid follows the kids around the house, tugging at them and watching over their shoulder, hovering while they study or cook, until they tell each other, ““She’s driving me nuts!”” (1989, 141).

Finally, midway through the summer, Brave Orchid persuades her sister to go see her husband in Los Angeles; Brave Orchid’s son (who is now a young man and old enough to feel the humiliation of the situation) drives them to the skyscraper where the husband’s brain surgery clinic is. He tries repeatedly to warn her against this idea, but she says only, “You can’t understand business begun in China. Just do what I say” (1989, 151). She forces him to go and fetch the husband under the guise of needing medical assistance for his aunt. He returns with Moon Orchid’s husband, who finds the two sisters lying in wait for him in the car. Far from the angry, righteous confrontation Brave Orchid has imagined, both sisters find themselves muted, as if “a spell of old age had been cast” on them (1989, 152). Seeing her much younger-looking husband, Moon Orchid realizes that to him “she must look like a ghost from China” and that by coming to the US—the land of ghosts—“they had become ghosts” (1989, 153). After taking them to lunch, his only appeasement, he sends them away.

The realization of her “ghostliness” seems to produce an irreparable breakage in Moon Orchid. She tries briefly to live with her daughter but eventually requests her own apartment, owing to her fear of the “Mexican ghosts plotting on her life” (1989, 155).

She isolates herself from her daughter and stops communicating with her sister. When Brave Orchid finds out about her sister's paranoia, she sends for Moon Orchid to stay with her again: "This fear is an illness...I will cure her," she says (1989, 155). Feeling guilty for the stress she has put her sister under, Brave Orchid tries everything she knows to call her sister's spirit back into her body, watching over her every night. but Moon Orchid's spirit ("her 'attention'") is "scattered all over the world" (1989, 157), and "each day Moon Orchid slipped further away" (1989, 157). Eventually, Brave Orchid must admit to herself that she has failed to anchor her sister to reality:

Brave Orchid saw that all variety had gone from her sister. She was indeed mad. "The difference between mad people and sane people," Brave Orchid explained to the children, "is that sane people have variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over." Every morning Moon Orchid stood by the front door whispering, whispering. "Don't go. The planes. Ashes. Washington, D.C. Ashes." Then, when a child managed to leave, she said, "That's the last time we'll see him again. They'll get him. They'll turn him into ashes." And so Brave Orchid gave up. She was housing a mad sister who cursed the mornings for her children...Perhaps Moon Orchid had already left this mad old body, and it was a ghost bad-mouthing her children. (1989, 159)

Brave Orchid figures madness not as the absence of rational reason but of imagination, or the capacity of hold multiple stories at the same time. While this definition runs counter to eurowestern interpretations of madness as "mental illness" (i.e. a biological fact), it is not necessarily less sanist/ableist, as it still gives Brave Orchid cause to "put Moon Orchid in a California state mental asylum" (ibid). Although she loves her sister very much, Brave Orchid seems to feel that it is bad luck to have a ghost in the house. She visits Moon Orchid in the asylum twice and is surprised to find her sister seems happier and that she has "made up a new story" (1989, 160). Moon Orchid delights, "I am so happy here. No one ever leaves. Isn't that wonderful? We are

all women here” (ibid). Moon Orchid introduces the young women of the ward to Brave Orchid as her daughters, telling her sister, “We speak the same language, the very same. They understand me, and I understand them” (1989, 160). The breakage in Moon Orchid caused by multiple abandonments seems to have been healed in part by these women, institutionalized for reasons that are never revealed, who offer Moon Orchid a form of Mad kinship. But Maxine tempers her perspective on Moon Orchid’s fate: “She had a new story, and yet she slipped entirely away, not waking up one morning” (1989, 160). Comparing Kingston’s ghostly representations of her aunts, Loh asserts that “No Name Woman’s ghost is the inhuman figure that allows us to question the boundary between madness and rationality because she is neither alive nor dead,” whereas “Moon Orchid’s character is physically alive and is not a literal ghost, but she is nevertheless excluded from her community and her institutionalization is a form of social death” (2018, 213). Both figures transit the liminal spacetimes between in/sanity and life/death, revealing the murkiness of such in-between states: being a ghost does not always equate to being dead and being alive does not exclude the possibility of being a ghost. Social death, too, generates ghosts, particularly at the intersections of race, gender, and Madness/disability where the pressure of oppressive forces is most intense. Loh’s interpretations of these two forms of ghostliness suggest that although they are maddened in different ways, both No Name Woman and Moon Orchid’s experiences of madness/ghostliness are generated out of exclusion—especially from collective story. Talking-story about her aunts is an expression of love and of Madness-as-kinship that enables Maxine to return a semblance of dignity to them, so that the stories of humiliation, exclusion, and death are not the only stories told about them.

The significance of Moon Orchid's presence for the young Maxine lies in the ways that Moon Orchid's story is also her own, both in the sense that they are sharing consensual realities and that they have ancestral connections to Madness that link them across spacetime to their marginalized ancestors who also experienced maddening gendered and/or racialized oppression. All the crazy women and girls in her memoir are made Mad kin in this way, mirroring the ways that Moon Orchid finds kinship with the women with whom she is institutionalized. Further, Kingston's representation of Madness through talk-story of No Name Woman, Moon Orchid, and other crazy women characters does not attempt to redeem Madness but suggests it as another way of seeing. At the same time, she does not diminish the material impacts (e.g. pain, separation from family and society) that can accompany Madness. She does not downplay Moon Orchid's suffering, such as her anguish over her nieces and nephews leaving the house or her deep paranoia of "outsiders"—but nor does she frame her aunt's life (and end) as only suffering.

Kingston's storying of Brave Orchid's relationship with her sister raises the differences between their experiences as Chinese women in China and the US, while also pointing to interconnected experiences of heteropatriarchal, xenomistic, and racist oppression. Brave Orchid seems to find ways to survive, despite Gold Mountain's attempts to get rid of her, such as by tearing down the family laundry under the excuse of urban renewal; she knows how to reconcile or at least hold in balance her own stories with American "ghost stories." Perhaps by "test[ing their] strength to establish realities" (Kingston 1989, 5), she tries to pass this survival skill along to her children so that they can go beyond balancing realities and create their own. This survival skill in part relies

on an understanding of “the self” as a form of fiction, one which Brave Orchid refutes through her relationship to the entwined collectives of Chinese culture and her family.

I follow Loh in thinking through the ways that Kingston’s talking-story of No Name Woman and Moon Orchid works against exclusions not by resorting to but instead “destabiliz[ing]” a human exceptionalist framework (2018, 210). Specifically, Loh examines the racialized and gendered madnesses of No Name Woman and Moon Orchid to understand how “the nonhuman” functions “as a rubric for disrupting the logic of human exceptionalism” (2018, 210). Loh asserts that Kingston is dismantling the self/Other binary by blurring the boundaries between them through this experience the eurowest calls “madness,” revealing the deep, culturally-inflected interconnectedness of “individuals” and “collectivity.” She explains that in the context of mainland and diasporic Chinese cultures, women carry a responsibility to preserve (familial, communal) collectivity, particularly by “perpetuat[ing] patrilineage” and “safeguard[ing] against the threat of familial fragmentation” (2018, 212); failure to uphold these prescribed responsibilities could result in “[being] deemed insane” (2018, 212). While No Name Woman and Moon Orchid’s “failures” make them “crazy,” this does not preclude from all pleasure or joy: Loh interprets their joy in pregnancy as the establishment of an “aesthetic connection of the lived, physical (pregnant) body to a feminine, collective social body” (2018, 220). However, I would add that this “aesthetic connection” to a feminine collective is also specifically inflected by Madness in *The Woman Warrior*, and that part of No Name Woman and Moon Orchid’s Madness arises from the incoherence or illegitimacy of their gendered expressions (e.g. having a child out of wedlock; “allowing” her husband to abandon her in China). Loh gestures to this

by noting that both Moon Orchid and No Name Woman are recognizable as crazy in part because they do not fulfill cisheteronormative expectations. That is, sometimes Madness emerges because its gendered difference is thrown up against a normative background of gendered, linguistic, and cultural coherency.

The “Minded” Mad versus the Mindless: Quiet Girl and the “R-Word Boy”

Representations of Madness/disability through the characters of No Name Woman and Moon Orchid gesture towards possibilities of healing and kinship. On the other hand, the characters of the “quiet girl”—“that one girl who could not speak up even in Chinese school” (Kingston 1989, 172)—and the “mentally retarded boy”—“the monster” (1989, 196)—complicate these interpretations and representations. These two characters appear in “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” the final chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, and contrary to embodying possibilities of healing and connection, they seem to trigger Maxine’s fears of exclusion, that she will be rejected for being the “crazy girl” of the family (1989, 6). In other words, that she will share a similar fate to No Name Woman or Moon Orchid. Maxine’s struggles with these fears manifest as sanist/ableist reactions to the quiet girl and the “R-word boy”; she attempts to distance herself from them ontologically and literally, as when she “torment[s]” the quiet girl (1989, 181), as well as discursively, as when she refers to the “R-word boy” as “monster, birth defect” (1989, 195), “were-person” (1989, 196), and “the huncher” (1989, 205). In this section, I analyze Maxine’s relationships to the quiet girl and the “R-word boy” together for the ways that their representations mutually inform each other, which illuminates the ways that sanist/ableist power works at the intersections of disability, race, class, and gender.

Whereas a “straight” reading might interpret Maxine as a normatively abled person who is simply struggling to be recognized as such (e.g. she just wants to fit in, she is not here to rock the boat or to challenge structures of oppression), a queer/Mad reading engages Maxine as a Mad/disabled narrator. Through this lens, Maxine’s sanist/ableist narration of the quiet girl and the “R-word boy” reveals more than the ways she feels about herself; it reveals the workings of sanist/ableist forces upon cognitively disabled people. Maxine does not position herself as justified in acting out her internalized sanism/ableism upon the quiet girl and the “R-word boy”; in fact, she knows she is in the wrong. At least in the case of the quiet girl, she experiences a kind of karmic retribution, of which she says, “The world is sometimes just” (1989, 181).

Close in age, Maxine and the quiet girl are peers in class; they attend the same American school in the first part of the day, and the same Chinese school in the second. The quiet girl comes from a wealthier family than Kingston’s and “[does] not work for a living the way” Maxine does (1989, 181). In part owing to her resentment toward their similarities, as well as her sense that this girl may in some way look down on her, Maxine feels an intense hatred for the quiet girl. Her fear bubbles up in moments where she recognizes aspects of herself in the quiet girl, aspects that induce shame: “I hated the younger sister, the quiet one. I hated her when she was the last chosen for her team and I, the last chosen for mine. I hated her for her China doll hair cut. I hated her at music time for the wheezes that came out of her plastic flute” (1989, 173). Most of all she hates the quiet girl’s silence, for this is part of Kingston’s shame. Although as a little girl she “enjoyed silence” (1989, 166), eventually it becomes a burden and a shame too; after spending an entire school year in silence, she subsequently “flunk[s]

kindergarten” (1989, 165). Maxine tells us that “[i]t was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery” (1989, 166). Similar to her hatred of the “R-word boy,” this hatred is also rooted in the fear that she will always be treated like the “crazy girl” of her family, that she will be pathologized and rejected, or even “gotten rid of” through marriage.

Maxine treats the quiet girl like her ghostly double. The girl haunts her at Chinese school, which is the one place that Maxine makes an effort to speak up. Throughout her childhood, Maxine struggles with voice and speech, torn between the conflicting imperatives “to whisper to make [herself] American-feminine,” on the one hand, and to “[holler] face to face” with the “shouters” of her Chinese emigrant community on the other (1989, 171). She practices using her voice, memorizing and chanting lessons back and forth with her younger sister in preparation for recitation at Chinese school. She says that even in adulthood, “[a] dumbness—a shame—still cracks my voice in two, even when I want to say ‘hello’ casually, or ask an easy question in front of the check-out counter” (1989, 165). Through constant practice, she eventually finds her voice. Unnervingly, one of her practice sessions involves the quiet girl. Maxine finds herself alone with the girl one day after Chinese school, when almost everyone else has gone home. For some reason, the quiet girl follows Maxine into the lavatory; perhaps she also recognizes something in herself in Maxine. With no explanation about why, Maxine is suddenly overcome with the urge to force the quiet girl to talk:

“You’re going to talk,” I said, my voice steady and normal, as it is when talking to the familiar, the weak, and the small. “I am going to make you talk, you sissy-girl.” She stopped backing away and stood fixed. I looked into her face so I

could hate it up close. She wore black bangs, and her cheeks were pink and white. She was baby soft...I could work her face around like dough. She stood still, and I did not want to look at her face anymore; I hated fragility” (1989, 176).

This urge seems to rise out of Maxine’s internalized sanism/ableism and also from her internalized misogyny; the entanglements of these oppressive logics are racialized for both girls, or as Maxine says, “I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl” (1989, 166). She wrestles with fear and disgust, for both of them, as she commands the quiet girl to talk. When the girl remains silent, Maxine resorts to pinching, shouting, and name-calling:

I squeezed one cheek, then the other, back and forth until the tears ran out of her eyes as if I had pulled them out. “Stop crying,” I said, but although she habitually followed me around, she did not obey.... “Say your name. Go ahead. Say it. Or are you stupid? You’re so stupid, you don’t know your own name, is that it?” (1989, 177)

This one-way “exchange” goes on and on as Maxine tries and fails to get the girl to talk. She only succeeds in making her cry, “sobs, chokes, noises that were almost words” (1989, 178). As if she is antagonizing herself, Maxine tells her, ““You’re such a nothing”” (1989, 178). All of the hurt she has experienced in the face of silence seems to come rushing out, her discursively violent attempts to narrate the quiet girl into speech shading in the margins at the edge of normal, making the one who cannot self-represent into an object of loathing. Discourse fails to serve Maxine in the face of a silence she cannot tolerate and which seems to spite all her practice at speech. She is crying now, but she refuses to concede. “[Y]ou are a plant,” she says, as if to herself, “That’s all you are if you don’t talk. If you don’t talk, you can’t have a personality” (1989, 180). The equation of speech or self-narration with “personality” or selfness

(and, in fact, personhood) seems to point to Maxine's complicated experiences of growing up in a household where she is constantly told to speak up, yet in the wider net of oppressions that constitute the white supremacist settler colonial US, she is discouraged from speaking up as a Chinese American girl. The talk-story tradition in which she is raised is at odds with the hegemonic storytelling of the US, in which universalizing and stereotyping stories relegate Maxine to non-speech and non-personhood by default. "Plant," like "vegetable" (common euphemisms for cognitive disability), represents both the lack of a "self" and the inability to take care of one's "self," a fate Maxine is terrified of. She cries harder. Then she realizes that they have been alone together for a very long time when she notices the shadows growing.

Seemingly to both girls' relief, the quiet girl's sister appears, ending the scene. Maxine finds her little sister and then all four girls walk towards home together, Maxine insisting to the older sister that their family "really ought to force [the quiet girl] to speak" (1989, 181). Immediately after tormenting the quiet girl, Maxine recounts that she "spent the next eighteen months sick in bed with a mysterious illness. There was no pain and no symptoms, though the middle line in my left palm broke in two" (1989, 181-182). Although Maxine prefaces this story by saying the "the world is sometimes just," she also reveals that she "[enjoys] the year being sick" (1989, 199).

Nirmala Erevelles describes haunting in discourse as that which often gestures to disability and the workings of sanist/ableist power without necessarily naming them (2011); Maxine's narration, though, bluntly names and demonstrates the devaluation and absence of humanity ascribed to cognitive disability, making it a more solid spectral presence, like the *Sitting Ghost*. For fear of what one might find there—i.e. that any

bodymind could be relegated to nonhuman status by being categorized as cognitively disabled—a reader might be tempted to resort to a redemptive reading of Maxine’s internalized sanism/ableism and its expression. But a redemptive reading doesn’t redeem cognitive disability, only the reader.

I posit that a Mad Asian American modality can hold multiple readings at once. One reading—a “straight” reading, perhaps, as Erevelles puts it—interprets Kingston’s storying to these two characters as “narrative prosthesis” in that they have utility for Maxine’s character development (e.g. as Michael Bérubé [2005] argues, the development of her capacity for self-narration as she journeys from silence to speech). This perspective attempts to redeem Kingston’s memoir and reinscribe positive value on cognitively disabled people by describing their utility for non-(cognitively) disabled people (e.g. texturing the conditions that “[make]...self-narration possible” [Bérubé 2005, 576]). But reading Madly (and queerly) shifts the central concern from the question of Maxine’s development, or what utility these characters and the positionality of cognitive disability they represent can do for her, to what Maxine’s narration does for cognitively disabled people.⁶⁹

One of the few pieces of Disability Studies scholarship that engages with *The Woman Warrior* is Michael Bérubé’s piece “Disability and Narrative,” in which he discusses examples from film and literature of disabled characters who exceed the function of “plot device” and challenge viewers/readers’ conceptualizations of narrative and narration, altogether. As one such example, he focuses on the character that Maxine

⁶⁹ Moreover, Kingston does not privilege the written over the oral as Bérubé does, nor does she limit self-narration to writing.

narrates as “the mentally retarded boy” in “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” the final chapter of *The Woman Warrior*. He appears not long after Maxine “discovers” her parents’ plan to marry off her and her sister so as to “get rid of [them]” (Kingston 1989, 192). He is portrayed in an animalist, at times monstrous way:

At Chinese school there was a mentally retarded boy who followed me around, probably believing that we were two of a kind. He had an enormous face, and he growled. He laughed from so far within his thick body that his face got confused about what the sounds coming up into his mouth might be, laughs or cries. He barked unhappily. He didn’t go to classes but hung around the playgrounds. We suspected he was not a boy but an adult. (1989, 194-195)

At first their interactions are limited to Chinese school, where the boy chases the school kids around the playgrounds and occasionally gives them toys from a mysterious bag. One day, he starts showing up at Maxine’s family’s laundry, and to her dismay her parents do not discourage him or tell him off. She interprets their tolerance of the boy as evidence of their plan to marry her to him. As a protective measure, she stops limping, thinking that her parents “would only figure that this zombie and I were a match” (1989, 195). She tries to distance herself from the strangeness of “the zombie” by excelling at school, but despite getting straight A’s, “nobody seemed to see that [she] was smart and had nothing in common with this monster, this birth defect” (1989, 195). Kingston seems to put the cruelest words in Maxine’s mouth, probably words she heard others use against this boy—what Bérubé gently refers to as “unsavory stuff” (2005, 571). Tellingly, he notes how “the R-word boy” comes to “haunt” Maxine, suggesting a recognition of the specter of disability in *The Woman Warrior* that he says he noticed only after teaching the book four times (ibid).

Bérubé interprets Maxine's loathing towards "the R-word boy" as an effect of her deeper fear—perhaps also then Kingston's deeper fear—of her inability to express herself. That is, this boy's inability to express himself or to self-narrate triggers Maxine to react with fear and hatred because she imagines that she, too, could be (or become) incapable of self-narration. Per some readings of the character of the quiet girl, this interpretation is probably borne out. I argue that such readings, including Bérubé's, are mired in eurowestern worldview and so neglect the radical potential of Kingston's writing, including her storying of Madness/disability.

To begin with, Bérubé makes a distinction between "the mindless," who are incapable of self-narration and self-representation, and "the minded" (which some Mad/disabled people are), who can represent themselves (that is, they have a self to represent) almost like full human, nondisabled narrators, apparently. He explains, "[m]adness is narratable and can even generate its own forms of narrative. Mindlessness is another *thing*, for it speaks to the conditions of possibility of narrative itself. The mindless, after all, can give no account of themselves; they will never come back to themselves after their bout of madness has served its narrative function" (2005, 571). The only parameters given for what might qualify as "mindedness" are "temporality and causality," which he does not explain, which seems to presume universal definitions for these "categories" (2005, 573). However, Kingston confuses both of these "categories of mind" in particular and universal definitions in general in *The Woman Warrior*, suggesting that perhaps the sane body/mind assumes shared definitions and the Mad bodymind does not. Kingston's talk-story shows that stable categories of meaning are not just unstable but often extremely ephemeral. Like the many kinds of ghosts in her

memoir, explanations of meaning (e.g. of “truth” and “reality”) are often shifting and hard to see. Others practically have a material presence, the weight of them pressing down like the ghost that sits on Brave Orchid’s chest. Different kinds of ghosts—and truths—are recognizable or visible to different kinds of people. Again, perhaps it is the Mad ones who see those “alter-realities.” This noticing becomes significant for the processes of shifting internalized images, breaking from those imposed by white supremacist settler colonialism (e.g. what Mignolo theorizes as “Truth without parenthesis” [2011, 70]).

Though it appears Bérubé is primarily theorizing mindedness/mindlessness in the context of literature, he tends to conflate “mindlessness” with cognitive disability without offering any discussion of the material implications of this analysis for cognitively disabled people. By writing to presumably “minded,” non-Mad/disabled readers, he continues the discursive trick of turning “mindless” people into objects of utility.⁷⁰ His articulation of a mindless/minded dichotomy, in addition to being deeply sanist/ableist, is steeped in Enlightenment rhetoric, by which he understands self-narration/representation as a prerequisite for selfhood, in particular democratic selfhood/citizenship. That is, one must be capable of self-representation in order to fully participate in democratic society.⁷¹ His slippages between “the mindless” (a group of

⁷⁰ When Patty Berne and the other Sins Invalid (2016) contributors to “Skin, Tooth, Bone” (their “Disability Justice Primer”) write about cross-disability solidarity, it is precisely in moments like this that I see opportunities for Mad/disabled scholar-activists to work in solidarity for Mad/disabled futurities in which no one must justify the existence of their bodymindspirits, especially not by arguing for their utility for those who are nondisabled or “not as disabled.”

⁷¹ On the other hand, this conflation of self-representation and social/democratic participation raises questions about the possibility of solidarity between Mad/disabled communities, queer and trans communities, immigrant and undocumented communities, Black communities, and Indigenous communities, among others—anyone who has been excluded from the standard Enlightenment rubric of the Human-citizen (what Mignolo refers to as “humanitas” [2011]).

people) and “mindlessness” (a thing) seem to further objectify cognitively disabled people, reifying the subject/object, self/Other, written/spoken, body/mind splits that Kingston’s Mad Asian American modality challenges.

He goes on to argue that the presence of cognitively disabled people “shed[s] light on the mechanics of narrative and narration” (Bérubé 2005, 576), particularly ruptures in the purpose, form, and execution of narrative. He encourages readers to “[reread] narrative from the perspective of disability studies,” particularly those narratives “whose textual self-awareness is predicated on the portrayal of cognitive disability,” and he argues that “[t]he point of learning to reread in this way is to try to learn what makes all reading and self-representation possible” (ibid), but he does not venture a guess about what this “what” is. Rather than being curious about this “what,” I am more curious about what happens in the world when we respond to the imperative to “learn what makes all reading and self-representation possible” by examining the utility of cognitively disabled characters. As Mad Studies scholar-activist Margaret Price explains, utilitarian arguments justify including disabled people in normative spaces (e.g. academic conferences) for what disabled people offer to those with normative bodyminds (2009), rather than, as the Sins Invalid Collective points out, because disabled people have inherent worth outside of capitalist notions of productivity” (2016, 17). By projecting this neoliberal, utilitarian reading onto Kingston’s work, he misses different readings—Mad readings, particularly in the context of a Mad Asian American modality—that confuse the (neo)liberal

Enlightenment foundation from which he is working.⁷² It may be too generous to say that Kingston is aware of the ableist tone in which she is storying the “R-word boy,” and perhaps Maxine’s spite towards him does derive from the fact of his “failure” to self-narrate. Perhaps the vitriol with which she describes him—“gorilla-ape,” “hulk,” “monster,” “freak”—has no deeper meaning than its surface-level insult. Bérubé asserts that they are evidence of Maxine coming into the capacity for self-narration that is triggered by the “R-word boy’s” haunting presence. Taking up these insults works to distance herself from the “R-word boy” but also from her own Madness/disability. This is the specter of disability at work, the “damage” from which Maxine tries to escape by “[bringing her] IQ up,” by “get[ting] A’s,” and by “tak[ing] care of [her]self” (Kingston 1989, 101). These are things the “R-word boy” is imagined incapable of doing, yet this is also why his presence disturbs Maxine: he has his own desires and motivations (such as hanging out at her family’s laundry or giving toys to his peers) that may seem mysterious to Maxine, but then again, her desires and motivations are not just mysterious but “crazy” to her own family. I agree with Bérubé’s that Maxine’s vitriol is an attempt to mask her fear, not because he embodies a form of “narrative prosthesis”⁷³ in which the presence of the disabled person is a bad omen, but because she suspects he has his own plans; Maxine fears that he might attack her. She describes being stalked by him. Her internalized sanism/ableism are muddled together with the fears instilled in

⁷² My guess is that this is because Bérubé is writing for an audience he assumes will fall entirely in his category of “the minded,” so he needn’t worry about offending “mindless” people—they won’t be capable of engaging him, anyway, according to the logics of this piece.

⁷³ Narrative prosthesis is a term coined by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder to describe the ways in which disabled characters are used in media (e.g. books, films) as devices of characterization (e.g. as plot devices, moral lessons) (2000).

her as a young Chinese American girl who suspects that “the women in [her] family have a split nail on [their] left little toe” because they are “descended from an ancestress who stubbed her toe and fell when running from a rapist” (1989, 198). Kingston represents the narrator’s engagement with this boy in a way that suggests she recognizes the boy’s participation in creating his own and other’s realities. Even those Bérubé designates as “mindless,” then, are significant to the co-creation of consensual reality. This possibility seems frustrating to Bérubé for a similar reason as it appears to frustrate Maxine, who hates incoherence, or at least what appears incoherent to her, as when she says, “I can’t stand fever and delirium or listening to people coming out of anesthesia” (1989, 202).

For the “straight” (or abled, white) reader, *The Woman Warrior* can be read as Maxine’s confrontation with the fear of silence-as-mindlessness (the silent/unspeaking person, especially girl, as less than human or even nonhuman)—a progress narrative in which she moves from silence to speech as she grows up. As I have argued, Kingston’s Mad Asian American modality suggests queerer readings, some of which reveal that manifestations of silence show up in different places in the text with different functions. At times, Maxine chooses silences and enjoys it. Elsewhere, she transgresses it, such as when she breaks the silence of her aunt’s death by putting No Name Woman’s story down on paper “after fifty years of neglect” (1989, 16). Her fluctuating relationship to silence and speech blurs the two categories, disrupting any meaningful “progression.” If the path of progress is not marked with more and more words, then the speech/silence

binary, too, becomes blurry.⁷⁴ I understand a Mad Asian American modality as extending this blurriness to other binaries that the Enlightenment maps onto speech/silence, including abled/disabled, self/Other, and human/nonhuman. Via such blurring, this modality confuses the Enlightenment rubric of humanness that is defined against the exclusion of those who fail to assimilate, including cognitively disabled people.

Conclusion

I was an undergraduate freshman when I first read *The Woman Warrior*; it was unlike any other book I'd been assigned in my schooling. While I was grateful to be introduced to literature beyond the masculinist white canonical texts that typically dominated our syllabus, I most assuredly did not have the creative maturity to understand *The Woman Warrior*'s power. In this case, I am referencing Kingston's ideas about "maturity," which Bill Moyers paraphrases during an interview: "Growing up means gaining the ability to carry ideas forth into the world" (Kingston 1990a, n.p.). I now read *The Woman Warrior* as an exemplar of transformative imagination in the ongoing tradition of women of color feminists who create art, theory, and activism to bring about radical change.

As I have argued in this chapter, the power of Kingston's Mad Asian American modality lies in the confusion, blurring, and interrogation of stable categories of meaning around disability, embodiment, humanness, and personhood. Such interrogation is necessary for scholars and activists thinking and organizing around

⁷⁴ For discussion on how silence and silencing are part of Asian American women's experiences of systemic oppression and how Asian American feminists interrogate the false binary of speech vs silence, see Patti Duncan's (2004) *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech*.

Madness/disability because if we remain reliant on eurowestern Enlightenment definitions of what it means to be human (e.g. self-awareness, rationality, self-representation), then the project of disabled liberation will always be a liberal, rights-based one, since the assumption is that the end goal is to become a human (and by extension a democratic citizen). As Mad/Disability Studies scholar-activists, our radical imaginations are extremely limited by this view. A Mad/Disability Studies which is traced through women of color feminisms must adopt the flexibility for confusion and blurriness that Kingston's Mad Asian American modality achieves.

At the nexus of racialized and gendered oppressive forces, Madness/disability seem to represent the "unlivable" in the sanist/ableist whitestream imaginary. On the surface, the Othering, violence, and oppression experienced by the Mad/disabled characters of *The Woman Warrior* seem to reify this. However, Kingston's storying of Madness/disability reframes these "individual" experiences within collective, interdependent, and ongoing Mad/disabled stories, specifically showing the ways in which a Mad Asian American modality realizes the simultaneity of multiple truths and realities. Further, this modality affirms that racialized and gendered Madness/disability is not reduceable to abjection but rather brings into question the rubrics by which humanness on the one hand and abjected non-humanness on the other are constructed. The Mad/disabled characters of *The Woman Warrior* reveal possibilities of holding onto multiple realities at the same time: if causality and temporality are simply experiential phenomena and not necessarily prerequisites for "mindedness" and thus a life worth living, then the possibility of going Mad, especially in a point-of-no-return kind of way,

is much less scary. Thus, such modalities are another way of perceiving (alter-)realities and another way of storytelling.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Dear Gloria,

For my final month of dissertating, I decided to come back home. Home is rural mid-Michigan, which means sugaring and mushroom hunting in the Spring, beach trips in the Summer, dazzling colors in the Fall, and not a little snow in the Winter. The name Michigan comes from the Odawa word mishigami (“great waters”). These are the traditional homelands of the Odawa, the Ojibwe, and the Potawatomi (the Three Fires Council). What does it mean to write—to tap trees, fish, mulch leaves, harvest pumpkins, to live—on lands that belong to someone else? I spend a lot of time these days thinking about how to materialize critical engagement beyond land acknowledgements, which do not unto themselves constitute decolonization (Tuck and Yang 2012). On the one hand, the answer seems obvious: #LandBack. On the other, this answer is complicated by ongoing questions of freedom and emancipation in the “afterlife of slavery” for landless and kinless Black people (Hartman 2007, 6). The end of the settler state is coming, and what comes next is being dreamed into being by the radical collective imaginations of people of color and their allies.⁷⁵

I am startled from my writing by a sudden gust of chill wind through my open window. I get up and look outside. The sun is setting, clouds are gathering in the distance. Birds, crickets, and peepers call to each other as the pressure drops. A storm is coming. I wonder if they are calling each other home, telling each other to batten

⁷⁵ The contributions in *Otherwise Worlds*, edited by Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, which bring together critical frameworks from Black Studies and Native Studies, constitute examples of this radical dreamwork (2020).

down the hatches. We've been expecting a storm around here because the weather has been unseasonably warm. Multiple 80-degree days in Spring is unusual even for Michigan; this kind of unseasonable weather signals what is to come if we do not act quickly in response to climate change. The approach of a storm always fills me with a sense of urgency: as the wind picks up and the air chills, we rush around the house to close windows and to bring vulnerable plants into the shelter of awnings. But this pressure drop also fills me with anticipation. Change is coming. Gloria, you wrote with tremendous urgency, which you balanced with hope. Women of color feminist work is filled with anger, pain, and grief—and also elation, pleasure, connection, and perseverance. With my particular Madnesses, it is hard to pace myself, but from your work I understand that transformation unfurls, fern-like, connected by unseen rhizomes; what starts as a tiny fiddlehead eventually reaches out, fronds brushing each other.

~Lzz

In this dissertation, I have argued for a genealogical reimagining of Mad/Disability Studies through women of color feminist scholarship-art-activism to shift the origin stories popularized by whitestream Mad Studies and Disability Studies scholars. I have demonstrated how such shifts intervene into eurowestern white supremacist colonial imaginary about Madness/disability. This works to dislodge Madness/disability as the “objects” of Mad/Disability Studies. I have also demonstrated how shifting whitestream origin stories also shifts the stakes of these fields, such that any Mad/Disability Studies project which pursues radical social transformation must

account for the ongoing interpersonal and structural violences of white supremacist capitalist settler colonial cisheteropatriarchy. That is, Liat Ben-Moshe's work leads me to understand that a radical Mad/Disability Studies is abolitionist, seeking the end of all carceral logics (2020). Perhaps a radical Mad/Disability Studies even seeks its own end as part of the end of eurowestern (settler) colonial academia, if this is what decolonial futures entail. Transformative Justice educator and curator Mariame Kaba informs my understanding of how an abolitionist vision can be centered within a radical Mad/Disability Studies, beginning with the radical transformation of individual and collective imaginaries. She writes,

When people, especially white people, consider a world without the police, they envision a society as violent as our current one, merely without law enforcement — and they shudder. As a society, we have been so indoctrinated with the idea that we solve problems by policing and caging people that many cannot imagine anything other than prisons and the police as solutions to violence and harm. People like me who want to abolish prisons and police, however, have a vision of a different society, built on cooperation instead of individualism, on mutual aid instead of self-preservation. What would the country look like if it had billions of extra dollars to spend on housing, food and education for all? This change in society wouldn't happen immediately, but the protests show that many people are ready to embrace a different vision of safety and justice. (2020, n.p.)

This reimagining, which becomes material change, is spiritual activist work.

Centering abolitionist frameworks *as* Mad/crip of color critical methods and methodologies moves Mad/Disability Studies closer to El Mundo Zurdo. Therefore, my own Mad dreams and methodologies continue to be deeply informed/transformed by the work of Mad/disabled women of color feminists Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Maxine Hong Kingston. The radical potential of Madness/disability was made salient to me before I heard the name “Mad Studies”—through women of color feminisms,

including Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), and Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. These works enact Mad/crip women of color feminist methods to shift, scramble, and confuse the dichotomous, either/or approach to Madness/disability centralized in whitestream Mad/Disability Studies (e.g. the medical model versus the social model, the material versus the discursive, the mental versus the physical, the metaphorical versus the literal). Women of color feminist frameworks exhort Mad/Disability Studies to shift away from rigid, binary understandings of Madness/disability (e.g. dis/abled, in/sane) enacted through gendered and racialized logics and systems of medicalization, pathologization, and institutionalization under the white supremacist settler colonial state. Their frameworks interrogate binary thinking, such that Madness/disability—like race, gender, bodymindspirit, “individual/collective”—become blurry and not easily defined. For instance, Lorde's biomythographic approach interweaves the deeply personal with the broadly social, holding spacetime for both the personal/embodied experiences linked to moments of encounter with “difference” and the overarching, interlocking systems of power against which she theorizes the resistance of Mad Black girls and women. Her use of Mad Black poetics prompts me to engage Madness/disability as imbricated with race, class, sexuality, and gender, while also troubling an oversimplified analysis of this imbrication by contextualizing felt/embodied experience of Madness/disability within ongoing conditions of anti-Blackness. Kingston's Mad Asian American modality blurs the boundaries between assumed categories (e.g. person/ghost; human/nonhuman;

material/spiritual), forcing a confrontation with the settler state's "present ethnoclass genre of the human, Man" (Wynter 2003, 312).

I do not read women of color feminists as saying there is no alter-reality or future spacetime where "human" is an acceptable concept/name/word.⁷⁶ Rather, I read their critical interrogations as specifically denouncing this "ethnoclass genre"-version of "the Human" as it is conflated with (especially masculinist, elite, abled, sane, christian) whiteness and hierarchized above all other forms and ways of life and being (Wynter 2003, 260). I hear them saying that until the dismantling of this violent hierarchy is undertaken, eurowestern white supremacist colonial renderings of "the Human" will continue to pervade individual and collective imaginaries and be exported via transnational imperial capitalism to all parts of the world. An implication of viewing Mad/crip identifications as having radical potential is critically examining and interrogating deployments of the term "human"; as I discussed in the chapters above, Indigenous Studies and Black Studies scholars explain that this term is weighted with ongoing histories of settler colonial displacement of and genocide against Native peoples, anti-Black racism, and "the afterlife of slavery" (Hartman 2007, 6). Under white supremacist settler colonialism, "human" is a hierarchal term constructed against Blackness (Wilderson III 2020). The work of scholar-activists in Mad/Disability Studies, including myself, is to figure out if and how the radical potential of Madness/disability can be mobilized in pursuit of these goals. I assert that shifting

⁷⁶ Those of us working in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Queer Studies, and Mad/Disability Studies need to critically examine the desire to take up the concept of "humanness," and our critical analysis *must* be grounded in Black Studies frameworks which articulate eurowestern "humanness" as positioned against Blackness.

genealogical roots to the radical work of women of color feminists, among other multiply marginalized scholar-artist-activists, empowers such pursuits by shifting individual and collective imaginaries, strategies, and practices.

Women of color feminisms remain key to ongoing conversations framed by Mad/disabled scholar-activists of color and their allies—seriously engaging the theoretical, practical, and methodological frameworks they offer must now be a central task for all Mad/Disability Studies scholars, in particular those who consider themselves community builders. This call for engaging women of color feminisms and other “alternative origin stories” also extends to Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Queer Studies, given that their “objects”—gender and sexuality—are not theorizable apart from race and its imbrications and overlaps with Madness/disability. The work of (re)centering and engaging alternative origin stories includes looking at (e)strange(d) genealogies of Madness/disability and identifying their Mad/crip of color methods and methodologies.

By (e)strange(d) genealogies, I mean storied connections between Mad/disabled people and racialized (“unReasonable”) Others—especially Black people—whose presences and experiences continue to be ignored by many Mad/Disability Studies scholars. According to Frank B. Wilderson III, “humanness” relies on the ongoing, simultaneous existence and subjugation of Blackness (2020). Further, Blackness and Madness/disability are intimately entangled through mutual constitution and overlapping histories (Pickens 2019; Erevelles 2011). Therefore, (e)strange(d) genealogies must be centered when critically engaging Madness/disability in the context of the US settler state if there is any hope for realizing its radical potential. If “radical”

means going to the root of something, as Angela Davis reminds me, then a radical approach to Madness/disability must go to their roots in Blackness. These genealogies are made “strange” when whitestream Mad/Disability Studies pushes them to the margins, but I see them as *estranged*—not exiled—because there is still a chance for reconnection, possibly even reconciliation. Notions of reconciliation are fraught in light of Saidiya Hartman’s critique of recovery and her assertions of Blackness as “wounded kinship” (2020). I cannot claim to know what tensions require resolution before meaningful reconnection—let alone reconciliation—can occur. However, even if there is no chance of reconciliation between estranged genealogies, there is at least the chance of solidarity between Mad/disabled people and unReasonable others which can fuel revolutionary possibilities. Simply put, there is nothing radical about a Mad/Disability Studies that refuses to understand how Blackness informs and conjugates Madness/disability.

Such (e)strange(d) genealogies include the “wayward lives” of queer, working class Black women—including their experiences with psychiatric incarceration—in 1920s and 30s america discussed by Saidiya Hartman (2019); Mad/disabled QTPOC care workers and activists like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera forwarded by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2019); and the art-activisms of radical Black creatives like Buddy Bolden, Nina Simone, and Lauryn Hill—who also experienced psychiatric incarceration—theorized by La Marr Jurelle Bruce as examples of “mad methodology” (2021). According to Bruce, Mad methodology

primes us to extend radical compassion to the madpersons, queer personae, ghosts, freaks, weirdos, imaginary friends, disembodied voices, unvoiced bodies, and unReasonable others, who trespass, like stowaways or fugitives, in

Reasonable modernity. Radical compassion is a will to care for, a commitment to feel with, a striving to learn from, and an openness to be vulnerable before a precarious other, though they may be drastically dissimilar to yourself. Radical compassion is not an appeal to an idyllic oneness where difference is blithely effaced. Nor is it a smug projection of oneself into the position of another, thereby displacing that other. Nor is it an invitation to walk a mile in someone else's shoes and amble, like a tourist, through their lifeworld, leaving them existentially barefoot all the while. Rather, *radical compassion is an exhortation to ethically walk and sit and fight and build alongside another whose condition may be utterly unlike your own*. Radical compassion works to impart care, exchange feeling, transmit understanding, embolden vulnerability, and fortify solidarity across circumstantial, sociocultural, phenomenological, and ontological chasms in the interest of mutual liberation. (2021, 10).

Bruce frames radical compassion as a way of knowing, feeling, and doing—embodied practices that bridge Mad methodologists towards each other and towards mutual liberation. This clarifies to me that liberatory ideas, practices and imaginaries are as spiritual as they are material. I interpret Bruce's enactment of radical compassion as both a Mad/crip of color method and a spiritual activist method. Additionally, he exhorts all readers to “build alongside” those “unReasonable others”; doing this ethically requires doing so relationally, listening “across circumstantial, sociocultural, phenomenological, and ontological chasms in the interest of mutual liberation” (ibid). Women of color feminisms also compel me to enact my own reimagining through frameworks of spiritual activism, which remind me that this “self” work is never separate from the collectives and communities of which I am a part. By shifting and expanding my imagination with consideration of my responsibilities as a Mad spiritual activist with white settler privileges, I move deeper into active listening and closer to making radical compassion a daily practice.

At the same time as each of us engages in these kinds of “self” work theorized by Anzaldúa and other women of color feminists, these processes are entangled with

“public acts” and other forms of “outer” work to build radical coalitions, mutual aid networks, and cross-disability communities. If there is potentiality in the concept of Mad/crip kinship, then this potentiality should compel scholar-activists in Mad/Disability Studies and adjacent trans-/interdisciplines, such as WGSS and Queer Studies, to enact kinship in horizontal, non-hierarchical ways, to treat each other as kin. “Treating each other as kin” means working against the replication of intergenerational trauma and harm and towards healing connectivity, reciprocity, and intentionality (e.g. mindfulness of gendered, racial, social, material, class, professional, and other power differentials).

The Mad/crip radical potential of women of color feminisms provokes Mad/Disability Studies, WGSS, and other scholar-activists—particularly those desiring or pursuing social justice and queer utopic horizons—to take seriously spiritual methods, methodologies, and activist practices (e.g. prayer, ancestral offerings, dreams and dreaming). Women of color feminisms demonstrate how spirit and spirituality are the wellsprings of activist creativity, radical organizing, and community building. Moving towards radical compassion discussed by La Marr Jurelle Bruce entails (re)connecting with these wellsprings and ancestral ways of knowing and doing. I understand radical compassion as putting into practice Mad/crip and women of color feminist awareness of the ways our bodymindspirits may at times appear discrete but in fact extend towards each other across spacetime, becoming entangled together. A radical practice of Mad/crip kinship includes recognizing that loving each other means loving our “selves.”

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