**The Dissertation Committee for Erica Hua Fletcher Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**


**Mad Together in Technogenic Times: A Multi-Sited Ethnography of The Icarus Project**


**Committee:**

_____
Jerome W. Crowder, Ph.D., Supervisor


_____
Rebecca J. Hester, Ph.D.


_____
Jason E. Glenn, Ph.D.


_____
Dwight Wolf, M.D.


_____
Bradley E. Lewis, M.D.


_____
Daniel M. Price, Ph.D.


_____
David Niesel, Ph.D., Dean, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

# Mad Together in Technogenic Times:  A Multi-Sited Ethnography of The Icarus Project

**by**

**Erica Fletcher**

**Dissertation**

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## Dedication

To my grandmother Ho Khua Mei, my mother Jung Hua Fletcher, and my sister Jessica Hua Robison. You are all flowers of wisdom, and your lives have enriched mine more than words can express.

# Acknowledgments

When I think about the many people, places, and affects that have become my interlocutors over the years, I find it impossible to trace all the many chance encounters and profound entanglements that have given this research shape and substance. Still, there are some people and communities without whom this work could not have come into being. I would like to thank my parents Jung Hua Fletcher and David Russell Fletcher for piquing my curiosity about those rather odd creatures we call "humans" and for fostering my sense of wonder. My sister Jessica has been a cherished confidant and source of support throughout my life. For countless hours spent reading through my papers and for her many other quixotic endeavors, she never ceases to amaze me.

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# Mad Together in Technogenic Times: A Mulit-Sited Ethnography of The Icarus Project

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Erica Hua Fletcher, PhD

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Supervisor: Jerome W. Crowder, MA, PhD

This dissertation describes concerns associated with the technologization of madness and instances when people with diverse mental states engage with technology to participate in the more-than-human world. Drawing from field notes, visual data, and interviews I collected in a multi-sited ethnography, I argue that technology can shape an individual's *environ(mental) niche*, bring people together, and create a sense of solidarity through sharing lived experiences within *posthuman emotional ecologies*. Paradoxically, such tools are unstable themselves: they can create volatile spaces in which people feel further alienated and fragmented as their "symptoms" of mental illness are performed publicly. Noting the many iterations of The Icarus Project in digital and analog spheres and my engagements with those involved, I also articulate the internal logics and contradictions within neoliberal forces that push individuals within the organization to perform particular economic rationalities in preparation for the seemingly inevitable collapse of their own mental states and of the group's functioning as a whole. Finally, I ask how we might begin to acknowledge the complexities of madness and loss in ways that do not further reify heroic—yet admittedly problematic—narratives of risk and resilience.

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# List of Abbreviations

ARMHC        Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective

C/S/X        Consumer/Survivor/Ex-patient

IRB        Institutional Review Board

TIP        The Icarus Project

UTMB        University of Texas Medical Branch

# Preface

> The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars.
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> —Jack Kerouac[1]

It doesn't matter if the stories are fact or fiction, really. Having been raised with a mother who inhabits a non-consensus reality, the tales from my childhood all blur together. Were government agents from thousands of miles away bent on separating my sister and me from her? Did my grandparents have little choice but to be criminals after they emigrated from Taiwan to Brazil? Did the church take away all our money and leave us with barely anything to buy food? As a child caregiver for my mom, who had persistent delusions and near catatonic states of depression for weeks at a time following my grandmother's death, I just listened and tried my best to believe in her and in her stories of immigration to two different countries, assimilation to different gods and tongues, the instability of inflated currencies, the evil of the world, and the looming terror of illness and frailty. And all of that was true—yes, of course it was true—but when we had to take down the family portraits from our tiny apartment walls because the people in those images were staring back at us, and when my father morphed into a traitorous monster, and when American society swarmed of sinister strangers and demonic forces, it became harder and harder to believe her. Even now, I'm left with so many unanswered questions and up-ended roots, not ascribing to any particular ethnicity or belief system or cultural practice (aside from a dull, persistent academic desire to critique)—an assemblage of intensities living the fictions and the realities of madness. And while my

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[1] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1957), 5.

mother's diatribes against psychiatry and the violations she experienced during an involuntary commitment to a psychiatric ward make more "sense" to me than many of those who were "sane" ever did, these stories don't seem quite real, or unreal either. They still fester within me. They take a life of their own. Yet, in the iterative process of story-telling—in turning the stories over and over again, I am finding some ways to tell them right and to offer up my voice in concert with others.

C. Wright Mills famously espoused the cultivation of a sociological imagination, a sense of placing personal troubles within societal or political ills.[2] For me, that exercise of imaginative power has eased some of the anxiety I experienced growing up in a household that felt like it was constantly at the whim of inexplicable forces swirling about, creating sadness and anxiety about being in the world. And in the process of naming those forces—capitalism, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, environmental degradation, sanism—I learned to relate to the many social injustices and cultural impositions others have experienced to a far greater extent than I. Within that recognition, I remind myself that we are all just struggling to tell stories about our process, change narratives that are unhelpful and demoralizing, and find meaning within the very real experience of suffering, trauma, and loss.

When I moved to the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina to begin my dissertation fieldwork with the Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective and their umbrella organization The Icarus Project, I quickly realized how my own narrative continued to play a major role in my life and shape my interactions with research participants. My story was more than just a way to establish legitimacy, a way to garner empathy, friendship, or support for the research project. And though I attempted to dismiss my brushes with madness entirely—as I had tried to do for so many years—or view it solely as narcissism or egoism to speak of my own experiences, nevertheless it

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[2] C. Wright Mills, *Sociological Imagination* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1-6.

became a source of reflection, a site for pause, a place for reckoning with the cacophony of perspectives on reality, wellness, and flourishing. Having spent many years in academia, trying to provide a particular kind of rationality, I was now pushed to prove the opposite, to claim those stretches of darkness and melancholy and silence as my own lived experience.

When I think of the many mad ones (as some members of The Icarus Project fondly call each other), the dear friends that I have met through this research project—either face-to-face or through the glowing light of my laptop screen—I wonder how best to tell their stories, what I would want mental health care providers to know about who they are, and the lives they have led. And it is all so much more than what can be gleaned from the physical examinations and medical charts and patient histories—at least the ones the physicians tell… The stories I want to share are about staying up late on the phone, hanging up and calling again and pleading in the middle of the night for a friend to stay alive. They are not linear narratives of loss and recovery, but shining moments of experience, revelation, and suffering. They are about the miracle of taking a walk in an ancient mountain range as the seasons change. They are of long conversations over coffee about mad love and suicide and art. They are of those little flickering ellipses on the corner of your computer screen that tell you someone is out there in the universe typing out a comforting sentence to send you when no one else is around, and the lively chatter of an email thread that draws people out of the woodwork to engage in community, even through a few brief exchanges of ones and zeros—the pulsing semiotics of digital communication. They are of cooking good food from scratch and sitting by a wood stove and of tears, check-ins, silence, hugs, meditation, and holding hands in a circle and deep breaths.

As I cultivate my own sociological imagination, see it flourish among radical mental health communities, examine the social inequities and environmental factors that exacerbate mental distress, and recognize the dearth of stories biopsychiatry tells about

diverse mental states, this dissertation will speak to the importance of what Sayatani DasGupta calls "narrative humility" within clinical and therapeutic encounters, peer-to-peer support, and beyond. DasGupta seeks to cultivate the recognition that no one—including health care providers—will ever fully know another's lived experience, that no one can be "competent" in all cultural practices, socio-political struggles, intergenerational traumas, and spatial histories. Still, she argues the stories patients tell can be seen as "dynamic entities that we can approach and engage with, while simultaneously remaining open to their ambiguity and contradiction, and engaging in constant self-evaluation and self-critique about issues such as our own role in the story, our expectations of the story, our responsibilities to the story, and our identifications with the story—how the story attracts or repels us because it reminds us of any number of personal stories."[3]

In this manner, conducting ethnographic fieldwork with radical mental health communities has been a deeply personal matter, just as it has been a political one. And while the many questions that I had when I entered my field site remain unresolved, open-ended, dynamic, or ineffable, I have found a sense for how my research asks what it means to be human in a world gone mad and how to move past discourses of the normal and the pathological, health and illness, sanity and madness. My project is about the importance of listening to others and to cultivating an attunement towards more atmospheric ways of conceptualizing mental health writ large. Moreover, this work has challenged me, transformed my ways of thinking and being in relation to others, and offered me a glimpse of the beauty of vulnerability, the power of story-telling, and the gravity of bearing witness to existential suffering.

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[3] Sayantani DasGupta, "Narrative Humility," *Lancet* 371, no. 9617 (March 22, 2008): 980-981.

## Introduction: Against a Sea of Troubles—Unraveling the Myth of Icarus and the Promise of Technology

> No one can foresee the radical changes to come. But technological advance will move faster and faster and can never be stopped. In all areas of his existence, man will be encircled ever more tightly by the forces of technology. These forces, which everywhere and every minute claim, enchain, drag along, press and impose upon man under the form of some technical contrivance or other—these forces, since man has not made them, have moved long since beyond his will and have outgrown his capacity for decision.
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> —Martin Heidegger[4]

Let us begin with three stories—stories that envelope each other and present us with troubling questions about technology, madness, and death. They go something like this: The first time I encountered Sascha Altman DuBrul was on my computer screen when I saw a video of him giving a Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) talk. From my home on Galveston Island, I clicked play and watched DuBrul speak forcefully about the importance of sharing stories and building community for those with sensitivities to the world around them. The punk rocker-turned-farmer-turned-social activist wore a yellow and black flannel shirt and sandals and walked briskly across a stage at a Hunter College Campus School in Manhattan. His gestures were further punctuated with a slight tremor in his fingers—a side-effect of taking lithium for bipolar disorder. He made jokes to a receptive audience and wove together a compelling story about how he co-founded The Icarus Project (TIP), a support network and media project, with his friend Ashley "Jacks" McNamara. As I write this at the end of April 2015, his YouTube video has over three thousand views.

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[4] Martin Heidegger, "Memorial Address," in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1969), 51.

In this video, DuBrul tells our second story, a story that he told hundreds of times prior—a story that can also be found in the 2002 vision statement for TIP and in his publication in *Journal of Medical Humanities*. I read an earlier version of this article and re-read the portion I have quoted from it below after he emailed me the final version that had been formatted for publication. In it, DuBrul writes about the myth of Icarus, the founding myth of his organization:

> As the ancient Greek myth is told, the young boy Icarus and his inventor father Daedalus were imprisoned in a maze on an island and trying to escape. Daedalus was crafty and made them both pairs of wings built carefully out of wax and feathers, but warned Icarus not to fly too close to the blazing sun or his wings would fall to pieces. Icarus, being young and foolish, was so intoxicated with his new ability to fly that he soared too high, the delicate wings melted and burned, and he fell into the deep blue ocean and drowned. For countless generations, the story of Icarus' wings has served to remind us that we are humans rather than gods, and that sometimes the most incredible of gifts can also be the most dangerous.[5]

This story has been taken up by those within the support network—some of whom see themselves within Daedalus, the father who had to live with the knowledge that his invention failed and the burden of his son's loss. Others have seen themselves as living in Icarus' rebirth or afterlife, following his salvation by mermaids who prevented him from drowning. Still, others wonder if there was really anything that could have been done to prevent his death—that even the best support from family or friends and guidance for how to use the gift of wings would not have stopped the boy from his fated end.

The last story is one that is not often told, but one that is suffused within the others. This is a story of a young Armenian woman named Sara Ann Bilezikian. A simple Google search of her name lead me to an image of her smiling, alongside a description of

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[5] Sascha Altman DuBrul, "The Icarus Project: A Counter Narrative for Psychic Diversity," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 35, no. 3 (July 2014): 258-259.

a peace internship program in her name.[6] Having taken Prozac for depression as a teenager, Bilezikian refused any further psycho-pharmaceutical medication, even after she had received a far more serious diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Instead, she studied environmental conservation at Evergreen College, tattooed her body, dreaded her hair, listened to punk music, and protested wars. One day in 2002, she jumped off a bridge and plunged to her death in the Susquehanna River. She was twenty-four years old.

In "Too Close to The Sun," DuBrul writes about the loss of his former traveling partner and lover. Published soon after her death, this was the first of his articles to grapple with what it meant to be crazy *and* critical of the psycho-pharmaceutical industry. In it, he describes Sara's perspective on psycho-pharmaceutical medication and its relationship to capitalism and its construction of a neoliberal subject,

> Sara didn't believe in a life without extremes, and she didn't want her experiences mediated by some drug made by The Man. "They just want you to think that you can't take care of yourself without those drugs," she'd say … Like so many of us, psych drugs symbolized defeat in Sara's eyes. Like having to spend your last money on a Greyhound after getting kicked out of the train yard and the highway. But worse because it's not just like popping a couple pills: taking psych meds means adopting a completely different lifestyle. It means having health insurance, so it means having a job, so it means staying in one place, so it means being stable, a worker bee. The pills are a constant reminder that you're dependent on the system that you hate to keep you alive and healthy, you're tied right into the death machine.[7]

His inbox soon filled with emails from friends and strangers alike who resonated with his portrayal of Sara and the tensions he also felt as a consumer of psycho-pharmaceuticals himself; and the overwhelming response he received from this article encouraged him to

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[6] "Sara Bilezikian Internship Inaugurated," *War Resisters League,* accessed April 22, 2015, https://www.warresisters.org/content/wrl-news-april-2012.

[7] Sascha Altman DuBrul, "Too Close to the Sun," The Icarus Project, January 29, 2002, accessed April 22, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/too-close-to-the-sun.

write another entitled "Bipolar Worlds," an essay which—in turn—catalyzed the birth of TIP. But that is a story for another time.

Thinking *with* these stories, we can begin to make some connection between the environment in which we find ourselves, the ways they help structure the way we understand ourselves in the world, and the ways in which we engage with others and technology. In storytelling, we ask questions like, Are we really "human" if that term may now signify a very diffuse state of inseparable connection to our digitally, interpersonally, and climatologically-mediated surroundings? How can those of us with great sensitivities to the world contribute to efforts within mad activism when the scope of our ethical responsibilities and moral commitments might extend far past humans, to the rest of the animal kingdom, nature, and beyond?[8] How does the language of biopsychiatry often fail to represent this diffuse state? What alternatives do we have to live poetically—to continue conversations unpacking madness, non-consensus realities, and the (ir)rationality of being in a crazy-making world? And how can we grapple at the instability of life and immanence of death? In listening to stories, I seek to expand them historically and critically—not to claim them as my own, but to guide their telling in a different (and possibly richer) way.

The other stories that I want to tell in the pages that follow are of fragility and loss in a technological age. The stories call us to grapple with the instability of our emotions and mental states as deeply entangled within the precarity of the technologies that we hope will help us find connection with others—that will save us from our existential loneliness and our own mortality. And while technology can help us come together in new ways, I wonder what happens when tools fail and our wings melt? When social networks cannot keep people from drowning?

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[8] See Van Rensselaer Potter, "Bioethics: The Science of Survival," *Bioethics: The Bridge to the Future* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1971), 1-29; Peter J. Whitehouse, "The Rebirth of Bioethics: Extending the Original Formulations of Van Rensselaer Potter, *American Journal of Bioethics* 3, no. 4 (Fall 2003) : W26-W31.

Despite Icarus' death and the loss of innocent belief in technology, the experiment continues. Since its founding in 2002, TIP has attempted to build radical mental communities through social media, publications, and local support groups across the United States and beyond. Joining consumer/survivor/ex-patient (c/s/x) movements, this grassroots organization challenges biopsychiatric ontologies and epistemologies by fostering more expansive views of mental states and seeks to cultivate "a new culture and language that resonates with our actual experiences of 'mental illness' rather than trying to fit our lives into a conventional framework."[9] They describe themselves as "people living with and/or affected by experiences that are commonly diagnosed and labeled as psychiatric conditions" and see those experiences as "mad gifts needing cultivation and care, rather than diseases or disorders."[10] The group has gained momentum as an online forum to share lived experience with mental distress, and soon after, TIP burgeoned into other spheres—including Facebook and local meet-up groups.

When I speak about a loss of innocence concerning technology, I refer to the etymological meaning of the innocence as the state of being "untouched." Technology, as I will argue—has real, material power. Yet, the trajectory of technology that concerns me the most is one which further perpetuates an abstracted, impersonal metric for stultifying ourselves and (re)producing overly-regimented roles in society. TIP's use of socially mediated technology, however, goes against this trend in some profound ways (even while it also reifies other aspects of such neoliberalizing forces). Digital tools touch contributors to the community. TIP fosters such intensities of affects—some of which may feel like deluge, while others act as gentle ripples outward. Either way, they are affected deeply. Thus, technology that touches—technology that is not innocent—can be

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[9] The Icarus Project, "About Us," accessed January 7, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/about-us.
[10] Ibid.

used to enframe us within particular singularities or to open us up to other ways of revealing ourselves.

As a part of my dissertation fieldwork, I embraced methods of engaged anthropology. In opposition to the "innocent" belief in a mode of study conducted "objectively," through pure observation, and without being touched by my research participants or the technologies they used, I sought to remain open to experiencing alternative ways of being myself and engaging with others. To that end, I conducted a multi-sited ethnography with TIP to trace the diaspora of their ideas throughout various analog and digital spaces. Having spent over a year voyaging through these spaces and working within their mad communities, I found that conversations on and off-line illuminate a moment in which our mental states are affected deeply by digital networks of communication. And in community with those who have suffered greatly from trauma and from poor interpersonal and societal relationships, the fragility of the mental states are projected, performed, and entangled within the dialogue, as are the environmental stressors (capitalism, racism, sexism, sanism, queer and transphobia, etc.) that help shape mental states. The ability to practice mutual aid and recognize the sensitivity, empathy, and social awareness of those who experience intense mental states runs alongside the ability to express thought patterns that could be seen as anti-social, paranoid, and—at times—further alienating and oppressive to those with mental struggles. These conversations sometimes lead to people leaving the community and others joining in on the conversations, even while the conversations themselves are housed on inherently unstable media. Within such discussion, belief in technology is sustained, even as it is critiqued; and as capitalism carves out new territories for expansion, neoliberal rhetoric also creeps into the very groups that recognize its encroachment as a major factor in mental distress.

The purpose of this dissertation is not just to document such conversations; I will describe the limits of biopsychiatry and why TIP's response to them is important,

interesting work. TIP resists aspects of psycho-pharmaceutical domestication and a facile

understanding that mental states can be ameliorated through solely individualistic,

biopsychiatric paradigms of pathology. In accepting the ineffable, immeasurable qualities

of diverse emotional and mental states; their political, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions;

and their deep entrenchment within the natural world, the community calls for reflection

and creation in the face of mental suffering.

However, this is not a heroic rendering of TIP and its ability to "save" those who

do not align themselves comfortably within a bio-psychiatric paradigm of mental illness.

As this ethnography shows, those in such networks have pieced together technologies

that—like the wax and feathers of Icarus' wings—can melt down and fall apart.

Furthermore, those attempting to think radically about mental states are no less

susceptible to perpetuating the hierarchies of class, race, and gender within their own

governance of such communities—even as they recognize those as the very stressors that

contribute to their discomfort in the world. Moreover, as the social movement matures,

neoliberal imperatives to solidify the national organization's processes, create consistent

governance throughout its spheres of influence, and mobilize its base of constituents

make it complicated to retain aspects of what inherently made the group interesting and

exciting in its emergence.

In addition, after spending several months with Asheville Radical Mental Health

Collective (ARMHC), an Icarus chapter in North Carolina, I found that the emotional and

mental limitations of community organizing—even the challenges of communicating

itself—are juxtaposed with the great need of people with diverse mental states to come

together and feel a sense of acceptance and belonging. Because their access to social,

political, and economic resources is often compromised within other spheres of their life,

regular meetings are a vital part of sociality for many of those who participate. Still, their

ability to coalesce is often thwarted by the same struggles that bring them a sense of

shared understanding. In examining their attitudes and practices towards on and offline

communication, I learned that being together can be as much an act of sacrifice, just as it can prove to be restorative practice. What is more, many contributors have written about their long-held critiques of technology and the challenges of participating within community, and some hold highly nuanced perspectives on neoliberalism and the psychiatrization of post-industrial societies and readily acknowledge the contradictory rhetorics and dissonant logics that permeate the c/s/x movements throughout the United States.[11] Rather, I provide descriptions of various encounters with research participants, alongside an ethnographic study of the fragility of the spheres they inhabit and the paradoxes that lie within their precarious position.[12]

In detailing aspects of my research participants and friends' lifeworlds, I do not mean to paint contributors to TIP in broad strokes nor assume that they are somehow in need of someone to speak for them. Indeed, as these pages will show, they come from radically disparate social, economic, and experiential backgrounds and seek a diversity of modalities to ameliorate their mental states. Many are highly technologically savvy and have their own platforms—blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, published articles, even books of poetry and prose—through which they discuss their lived experiences and mixed attitudes towards psychiatry. And although there are problematic aspects of acknowledging diverse abilities, some people are higher-functioning than others and can perform in "sanist" ways that makes them more successful in organizing radical spaces and providing mutual aid.[13]

Furthering an kind of anthropology that questions neoliberal and biomedical models of the self, the larger conclusions I make stem from developing an understanding

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Vilma Santiago-Irizarry, *Medicalizing Ethnicity: The Construction of Latino Identity in a Psychiatric Setting* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 7.

[13] Nev Jones and Timothy Kelly, "Inconvenient Complications: On the Heterogeneities of Madness and Their Relationship to Disability," in *Madness and the Politics of Disablement,* ed. Helen Spandler, Bob Sapey, and Jill Anderson (London, UK: Polity Press, 2015), 43-56.

of technology that is deliberately no longer innocent. Exploring an attunement in which technology is affective, immediate, and embodied, I argue that the technologization of the self can be seen in both the medicalization of the body and the effects of digital communication upon mental states. This dissertation presents a framework to destabilize what it means to be human within technologically-mediated, emotional ecologies; provides examples of the ruptures and continuities that have shaped TIP's development; and describes the promises and perils of such tools in shaping how we think about ourselves and others.

## Relevant Populations

Here, I must pause to clarify the populations with whom I have worked and who I see as being affected negatively by the imposition of solely psychiatric frameworks upon their lived experience with diverse mental states: First, there are people who have exhibited eccentric, aberrant behavior and who have been wrongly pathologized for peaceful deviance, that pose no overt harm to themselves or others. Second, there are those who struggle greatly with mental distress in ways that are hindered by a limited epistemology within psychiatry that frames mental illness as an individual, neurochemical imbalance, one that may overlook the social determinates of mental health. At times, there may be overlap within these groups as the psychiatrization of certain harmless yet unusual behavior becomes increasingly pathologized and as the initial stigmatization from a diagnosis and perceived chronicity may contribute to greater mental distress later on. On the other hand, some people may benefit from using psycho-pharmaceuticals and other psychiatric interventions to help stabilize their mental states during acute points of crisis, and eventually shift towards non-pathological (yet still peculiar) behavior. Within both these groups, questions arise about how bodies become read as pathological and who is able to tell stories about lived experiences. Likewise, neoliberal and biomedical framing of technology serves to isolate and disempower

individuals and their communities. While the promise of an affectively attuned technology attracts many of TIP's contributors, they struggle with the challenges of being with each other in troubled states, communicating their struggles, and listening to the plights of others who find themselves in precarious mental states and difficult circumstances.

Secondly, I must also address the stories that remain untold—the ones that were not privileged by memorialization that are largely absent from this dissertation—namely those from racial and ethnic minorities. Their absence from TIP's origins in 2002 and from my encounters in Asheville, NC is troubling—given the pathologization of particular (non-white) ethnicities and the mass incarceration of black men (and often subsequent forced medication) in the United States.[14] However, as many scholars have noted—there are certain privileges inherent within possessing the social resources to be psychiatrized rather than criminalized.[15] It is an important questioning my field as to whether particular criticisms of neoliberalism or biomedicine can encompass this simple (and profoundly true) criticism of privilege, but one of the tasks of this work to understand how deeply an affectively charged technology can put into question our humanity, and what is shared by virtue of our specific embodiment within a culture and what is shared by virtue of the technology we choose to extend that embodiment (and at what cost).

What is more, there is another level of privilege in being able to resist aspects of psychiatry in such a way that gains credibility and traction against fellow activists, donors, and scholars—a privilege that is not easily afforded to historically marginalized populations. Living in the largely white, mostly segregated town of Asheville, NC and

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[14] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet.

[15] Peggy McIntosh, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege," University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, accessed May 6, 2015, https://www.isr.umich.edu/home/diversity/resources/white-privilege.pdf.

working with only white research participants put into relief my experience moving to the largely black neighborhood of Crown Heights in Brooklyn, NY and attending Icarus events in Manhattan populated with similar white demographics. Their absence is further pronounced in TIP's recent efforts to decolonize their organization (as further discussed in Chapter 4) and gave me fodder for thinking deeply about those without the political and technological resources to enter into digitally-mediated communities.

## Technologization of the Self

To begin, we must ask a few broad questions—what do we mean when we talk about technology? What is the problem with technology? And what do we mean when we speak about the technologization of the self? Philosopher Martin Heidegger takes up these questions and brings to the surface our assumptions about technology in his still resonant essay "The Question Concerning Technology." In it, he argues that technology most often (and incorrectly) is seen as any human activity that involves crafting something as means to an end. What is more, science—as the hallmark of such calculative thinking and crafting of tools—posits an instrumental (or technical) perspective of humans and other objects, making it appear that their essence is that which they can be quantified, measured, utilized, and optimized in certain ways.[16]

The technologization, intrumentalization, and optimization of the self has long posed demanding questions for what it means to be in the world. TIP posits a way to think more deeply about some of those questions by resisting certain technological encroachments, embracing others, or—in many instances—finding a third space that does some of both. First, they trouble the ways we come to think about ourselves through psychiatrized terminology (found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

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[16] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1977), 4-5.

Disorders) and the way biopsychiatry conceptualizes madness in problematic ways. Secondly, even while they resist certain aspects of biopsychiatry, they utilize other modes to represent, even instrumentalize mental states through social media networks and other forms of communication. While each mode does seemingly disparate tasks and plays different roles in the way people come to see themselves, thinking broadly about the technologization of the self—and its neoliberal imperatives—may be a helpful starting point to launch into a discussion for why TIP is an important endeavor.

However, Heidegger would say that this perspective of "Truth" is partial and limiting, since the tools we have can never fully capture or master that which they seek to study.[17] To that end, he writes, "Thus when man, investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectless of standing-reserve [potential]."[18] In very base terms, I interpret his work to mean that our frameworks shape the kind of knowledge we produce, as do the tools through which we measure the world. As we come to think of ourselves as representing reality and engage in more calculative modes of thought, we deceive ourselves into believing that we have found truth, not just mere (partial and reductionistic) representations of that which was studied.[19] Furthermore, the attributes that we ascribe to certain objects—such as cultural attitudes, norms, and practices are always overflowing in their meaning and depth and changing over time; and because we cannot fully capture their elements, we cannot claim a form of mastery or control over them.

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[17] Ibid., 5.
[18] Ibid., 19
[19] Ibid., 23.

**BIOPSYCHIATRIC TECHNOLOGIES**

Conceptions of selfhood as static entity and time as a linear process are at the crux of problematic approaches to mental illness—in which the terms for what counts as pathological behavior have already been set and through which disease chronicity is projected into the future. Many scholars have already deconstructed the problematic assumptions underlying how modern biopsychiatry is often practiced, in which mental illness is treated on the largely discredited premise of an individual, neurochemical imbalance in the brain.[20] Such a perspective, as social theorist Nikolas Rose points out, is that it places undue responsibility on individuals to monitor and track their mental states, to see themselves in instrumental ways that must be optimized and mastered. He writes,

> The person, educated by disease awareness campaigns, understanding him-or herself at least in part in neurochemical terms, in conscientious alliance with health care professionals, and by means of niche-marketed pharmaceuticals, is to take control of these modulations in the name of maximizing his or her potential, recovering his or her self, shaping the self in fashioning a life. They are intrinsic to the continuous task of monitoring, managing, and modulating our capacities that is the life's work of the contemporary biological citizen.[21]

The internalization of this mode of being further reifies the primacy of science and limits the possibility of the individual to see herself as caught up within larger structural forces that shape the very way she thinks.

Furthermore, as others have detailed in depth, the evolution of the ever-burgeoning diagnostic categories for mental illness cannot be separated from the imperatives of pharmaceutical corporations' research and development nor their

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[20] See Bradley Lewis, *Moving beyond Prozac, DSM, and the New Psychiatry: The Birth of Postpsychiatry* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 165-172; and Pat Bracken and Phil Thomas, "Postpsychiatry: A New Direction for Mental Health." *British Medical Journal* 322, no. 7288 (March 24, 2001): 724-727.

[21] Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 223.

entanglements within the American Psychiatric Association and the practice of American psychiatry itself.[22] As one in four Americans are projected to have behavior which could be psychiatrized as mental illness at some point in their lives, it is hard not to wonder who decides what is abnormal behavior in the first place? And who are the stakeholders and benefactors in positing such large-scale pathology? Or rather, how does technology bring us to think about ourselves in certain ways, beginning with the fiction that there is a "who" or a single mind responsible for decision-making? Yet, in filtering out environmental stressors that contribute to mental anguish and accepting the problematic, capitalist way mental illness has been understood in recent years, psychiatrists limit the possibilities for current patients to embody alternative prognoses and for the future to reveal itself in unexpected ways.

## SOCIALLY MEDIATED TECHNOLOGIES

What makes social media spheres and other digital platforms that TIP inhabits interesting is that there is no hegemonic, prescriptive element to the ways people can approach their engagements with psychiatry. The terms for managing illness or even conceptualizing patterns of behavior in terms such as "illness" are not set, and people's lived experiences and perspectives on their mental states create a dialogical space in which personal truths intermingle and come together. Thus, the terms for engagement are distinctive—yet not completely dissimilar—from the relational dynamics of psychiatrist-patient; and as stories are validated and corroborated with others, tenuous forms of knowledge and shared understanding emerge. Thus, in some ways, the open-ended qualities of such technologies for discussing diverse mental states with peers differ quite

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[22] See Robert Whitaker, *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2010), 57; Stuart A. Kirk and Herb Kutchins, *The Selling of the DSM: The Rhetoric of Science in Psychiatry* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transactional Publishers, 1992), 8-12; Stuart A. Kirk and Herb Kutchins, *Making Us Crazy: DSM: The Psychiatric Bible and the Creation of Mental Disorders* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1997).

dramatically from the prescriptive technologies of psycho-pharmaceutical medication, while in other aspects, they mirror the surveillance of self and others that is often found within clinical encounters.

## Neoliberalism and the Technologization of Risk and Resilience

In both medical and social mediated technologies, the danger within its usage lies in placing too much trust upon the tools, even to the extent that we come to see ourselves as an extension of the tools themselves, as objects ripe for optimization and productivity. Such an instrumental view of humans perhaps is already immanent and all-encompassing and speaks to a push towards neoliberal conceptions of humanity. Neoliberalism, as defined by Michel Foucault, seeks "to extend the rationality of the market, the schemas of analysis it offers and the decision-making criteria it suggests, to domains which are not exclusively or not primarily economic."[23] Characterized by seeing oneself in monetary terms—as an object whose value lies solely within its economic value, the neoliberalism of the self seeks to mitigate the risk of failure (nonproduction) and to prepare for potential disruptions against its ability to perform in economically aggrandizing ways.

In regard to biopsychiatry, the neoliberal forces that influence the ways certain bodies are deemed normal or pathological has been theorized substantially.[24] This shift in how we have come to see ourselves as neoliberal subjects is most evident in the use of psycho-pharmaceutical drugs for cosmetic purposes to enhance concentration and other forms of brain functioning. In this troubling example, the reaches of biopsychiatry extend

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[23] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979.* (New York City: Picador, 2010), 323.

[24] See Michel Foucault, *Madness: The Invention of an Idea* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2011); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1988); Thomas Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness: A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement* (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1977); Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974); and Allan V. Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

far beyond "ill" bodies to those who have deeply internalized the need to perform to the extent that they are willing to change their neurochemistry for the sake of productivity.[25] As I will discuss further in Chapter 3, feminist critiques of the field note the ways social norms and capitalist imperatives for order and production have shaped the way bodies are read. For now, however, it will suffice to note that one of the primary indicators of a mental illness such as depression is its effect on "one's ability to function in work or school or cope with daily life."[26] What counts as mental illness, therefore, is always already wrapped up within expectations for labor at work and home, as well as other measures of productivity.

What may be more difficult to see initially is how TIP may also, at times, fall into a similar neoliberal trap of believing in the saving grace of tools and technology. And as some seek to replace or augment psycho-pharmaceuticals with other techno-interventions (such as digital communication and participation in local Icarus groups), they come to find that such spaces also come with risks and dangers of their own. The very premise of their seminal publication, *Friends Make the Best Medicine*, begins to instrumentalize the meaning of friendship and view people as interchangeable with other tools to stabilize extreme mental states. Similarly, in the iterative performance of madness online and the outpouring of status updates, blog entries, video blogs, and plans of action in cases of crisis, the desire to create a new language for discussing mental states can become self-promotional in nature and place too much responsibility upon individuals to craft heroic narratives of resilience and will themselves to imagine alternatives ways of being in the world. What is more, in planning for times of crisis—as individuals and as those within an organization, the underlying belief remains that it might be possible to shore up

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25 Bradley Lewis, "Prozac and the Post-human Politics of Cyborgs," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 24, no. 1/2 (Summer 2003): 52.

26 World Health Organization, "Mental Disorders," October 2014, accessed April 30, 2015, http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs396/en/.

defenses and create safe spaces against an onslaught of mental suffering and the precarity of mental states. Yet despite neoliberal encroachments within TIP, there is something that overflows in meaning and shared understanding, something that escapes—even momentarily—such calculative frameworks.

## Mad Together

In *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, psychologist and technology scholar Sherry Turkle asserts that the pervasiveness of technology may harbinger the downfall of "authentic" face-to-face communication—one that is not set on our own terms and timeframe, one that cannot be deleted, retyped, and spell-checked before it is sent.[27] To that end, she writes, "At the robotic moment, we have to be concerned that the simplification and reduction of relationship is no longer something we complain about. It may become what we expect, even desire."[28] And in the immediacy of the Internet, we are simultaneously more connected than we have ever been, yet more fearful of having difficult conversations, experiencing intimacy, and generally being with others in person.[29]

Aspects of Turkle's ethnography I found rang true—particularly with those who felt their social skills were lacking in person.[30] Still, I found that for many other Icarus

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[27] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 187.

[28] Ibid., 295.

[29] Ibid., 280-281.

[30] Interacting on the forums, I met one Icarus member who self-identifies as behaving in ways that could be placed on the spectrum for autism—including an inability to read social cues well—and finds some solace in the simplicity or straightforwardness of interacting with others online. Another person I met initially through e-mail exchanges, in which he expressed his reservations about having an "outsider" join the Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective, eventually befriended me and became involved in the research project. One day, while we were taking a walk together, he told me that he found it easier to express himself online and to "listen" to others' beliefs and practices. E-mailing allows him to craft a clear message—separate from the anxiety he might feel interacting socially in an unfamiliar environment.

contributors, the Internet becomes an additional space for legitimate relationship with others. Rather than reducing the quality of relationships formed, connection, intimacy, and legitimacy take on different dimensions online; and in the several months I spent with Icarus contributors, I found that they were anything but alone together.[31] Rather, the shared sense of imminent danger and the instability of the tools themselves makes their attempts to fly away from the island and find a balance between the sun and the waves even more precarious.

In the madness and messiness of finding connection with those who suffer from diverse mental states, TIP is not without its controversies, fragmentations, internal strife, and interpersonal conflict—for some, it has been a harmful, invalidating space.[32] For others, TIP has saved their lives in times of crisis, given them hope and solace, and helped them form friendships across the county and beyond. And within the flurry of conversation, the real "project" of TIP lies within its constant chatter—in the sense of solidarity, camaraderie, and—at times—fragmentation and offshoots that come from being mad together.

<div align="center">…</div>

Communities, often defined and refied by those researching them, have long remained elusive and illusionary in nature. Because TIP—particularly its digital iterations—is not geographically, even temporally bounded, can it still, in some sense, be considered a community? And how can one begin to define it when depictions of the social norms or mores within a community vary extensively, depending on the perspective, personality, and skill set of the researcher and the medium through which she examines its culture(s)? Similarly, if we are to take culture seriously as a process—

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[31] In fact, The Icarus Project's motto is "You are not alone."

[32] Such sentiments do not deny the real challenges associated with mutual aid and peer-to-peer support, when the toil of care of others may itself exacerbate one's own mental distress or emotional exhaustion.

not an object to be grasped, how can we describe all of its ethereal and malleable facets within a perpetual dynamism and flow?

Here, it may be helpful to consider what it may mean to be "mad together" during a time in which technological perspectives are so close to hand. The Oxford Dictionary defines the term "mad" as follows: "1) Mentally ill; insane; 1.1) extremely foolish or ill-advised; 1.2) In a frenzied mental or physical state; 1.3) Very angry; 2) Very enthusiastic; 2.1) Very exciting."[33] Perhaps there is something insane or rather foolish in bringing mad people together to support each other. Indeed, there is something very exciting about it, too.

In the overflow of discussion on and offline, TIP shows that meaningful, both technical and nontechnical, connections can form within an array of spheres. If we take seriously the organization's motto "You are not alone," we must also rethink what it means to be "together," in relationship with those of us who navigate diverse mental states. As the Oxford Dictionary defines the term, "together" can mean, "1) With or in proximity to another person or people; 1.1) So as to touch or combine; 1.2) In combination; collectively; 1.3) Into companionship or close association; 1.5) So as to be united or in agreement; 2) At the same time; 3) Without interruption; continuously."[34] Yet, what does it mean to be "together" when that term no longer denotes proximity, concurrency, or continuity? What does it mean to be together when there is not a singular community, identity, or idea that serves as a uniting force, but rather a maddening ontology of diverse fragmentations, fissions, ruptures, and multiplicities? In

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[33] Oxford Dictionary, "Mad," accessed April 16, 2015, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/mad#MAD.

[34] Oxford Dictionary, "Together," accessed April 16, 2015, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/together.

technologically-driven times of fluidity, divisiveness, complexity, generation, and loss,

might we all be mad together?

To think about diverse mental states as shared in community with others offers a

stark contrast to the Enlightenment's conception of Man as possessing an independent

ego that exists in opposition to the world and to other minds. The Enlightenment human,

heir to the Stoics of Ancient Greece, strives to be unaffected by his relationship to the

Other and the consequent slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (See Figure 1).

Ecologist Mick Smith notes this tradition was furthered propelled by Cartesian dualism,

and argues that the Western tradition brought into being a "world-view that accepts the

'masculine' ideal of an essentially rational, unchanging, autonomous and emotion-free or

emotionally controlled human subject, who has the ability to fully represent the external

world within a universally applicable, objective, and rationally determined symbolic

order."[35] Such notion is one that underlies Turkle's attitudes towards human development

and maturity in relation to technology, in which the construction of selfhood is as a

teleological journey of self-actualization with an ultimate good or end. Likewise, the

prevailing telos TIP critiques is one that searches for a moment of wholeness and for a

singular narrative that brings a sense of coherence to life, one in which the ego can come

to a greater level of self-awareness and strive for more "authentic" relationships with

others. This search premised on a particular idea(l) of a future in which salvation,

restitution, and redemption may lay within reach—one in which a psychoanalyst can help

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[35] Mick Smith, Introduction, in *Emotion, Place, and Culture*, ed. Mick Smith, Joyce
Davidson, Laura Cameron, and Liz Bondi (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 7.

uncover or one in which a psychiatrist might be able to achieve in her patient given the right combination of psycho-pharmaceutical elixirs.[36]

Instead, the ecological rendering of madness I have found within TIP is one in which we profoundly affect each other, in which we become undone by experiencing our own states of terror, witnessing the social injustices that pervade our world, and finding a shared sense of suffering in a swiftly "civilizing" (i.e. neoliberalizing) world. Of emotions and spatiality, Smith writes, "Emotions are vital (living) aspects of who we are and of our situational engagement within the world; they compose, decompose, and recompose the geographies of our lives."[37] Likewise, as I will explain further in chapter 5, those participating in on and offline forums talk about their lived experiences of madness with an understanding of space that extend far beyond physical presence, where they experience a continual (re)composing and (de)composing emotional ecologies. Thus, in troubling egotistic conceptions of being in the world and in embracing the entanglements of emotional, social, technological ecologies, we can come to see posthumans as a decentralized components within greater forces and flows.

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What is fascinating about TIP is despite the many barriers to call itself a community and to form connections amongst those with sensitivities to the world, the need to speak and the desire to come together—to be mad together—remains. Philosopher Daniel Price describes the babbling forth within the communities, not as a reification of a Community or "togetherness" as such, but as a call to "share a world." He writes,

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[36] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 177.
[37] Smith, Introduction, 10.

> We do not speak, as our inherited metaphysics presumes, about ourselves in order to convince others to share our views; we speak in order to share a world that is, otherwise, quite ineluctably slipping away. To assume that any "we" can speak in a shared voice simply cannot be justified—yet the shared premise … is that we should still speak.[38]

Perhaps there is no "we" that can form an adequate description of the Icarus Community as such or a definitive rendering of it, but the continual striving to be mad together—in the face of great odds—is heartening and affirming in itself. And it is the moment that Icarus and his father Daedalus peered out on to the land beyond the ocean, clutched their frail wings, and jumped together that deserves our attention.

## Outline

Chapter 1 creates a linguistic framework to describe *technogenesis* as the co-evolution of humans and technology and theorize the environmental factors that contribute to mental states. Incorporating posthuman theories of Mick Smith and N. Katherine Hayles, I argue that TIP seeks to "uncivilize" madness by placing emphasis on the societal factors and *emotional ecologies* that contribute to stress within *environ(mental) niches*. Resisting aspects of the individualizing rhetoric of biopsychiatry, which all-too-often emphasizes personal responsibility in coping with mental illnesses processes, TIP provides an alternative framework for describing mental states, one that allows us to think differently and inhabit the world in new and exciting ways.

Chapter 2 articulates the practice of *schizoanalysis*—as described by Deleuze and Guattari—and of *bricolage*—as described by Claude Levi-Strauss—in relation to my methods for working with mad communities on and offline. I situate this approach to data

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38 Daniel Price, Introduction, in *The Movement of Nothingness: Trust in the Emptiness of Time*, ed. Daniel Price and Ryan Johnson (Aurora, CO: Davies Group Publishers, 2013), 1.

collection in relation to grounded theory, participant observation, and community-based participatory research. These mixed methods allow me to explore research questions with participants and generate ongoing, open-ended conversations with them throughout my time conducting fieldwork. In addition to incorporating interviews, field notes, photographs, videos, digital communication, and digital archives within my academic writing, I also used digital communication to inform research participants about the project's progress and engage them in dialogs in multiple spheres. In discovering the many contours of TIP's iterations, I describe the rather "schizophrenic" qualities of the organization, sketch out its incredibly fluid instantiations, and embody some of these techniques within my own scholarship.

Chapter 3 contextualizes the narratives of Elizabeth Packard, Judi Chamberlin, Kate Millet, and Jacks McNamara within the history of resistance movements against psychiatry. Here, I outline their arguments for self-determination against the backdrop of the developing field of psychiatry and its historic pathologization of women. I also describe how these narratives create an admittedly tenuous—yet important—lineage of those who have advocated for patient rights and alternative perspectives in mental health discourses. In tracing the stories of those who many in c/s/x movements see as prominent figures, I aim to situate TIP as an embodied practice and form of resistance within and against larger health social movements and describe how this group's nuanced position towards engaging with aspects of psychiatry moves past problematic stances within such movements.

Chapter 4 provides the history of TIP to demonstrate the instability of social media and the digital platforms chosen to host the organization's digital presence—all of

which have structured the direction of the organization. Decisions to collectivize the national leadership structure parallel decisions to use open-source coding, maintain transparent financial operations. Likewise, the national organization's move away from radical ways of web development in recent years follow their attempts to solidify leadership structures and conform to more traditional models of nonprofit organizations. The neoliberal push can be seen not only within the national organization's leadership structure, but also within its endeavor to create safe spaces within its digital platforms and local chapters. I describe TIP's many iterations in relation to recent neoliberal impositions to prepare the organization internally and externally for the potential destruction its mad staff and membership may cause. Such rhetoric in risk and resilience serves to further reify what it means to live with unstable mental states and prepare for inevitable disaster, however it manifests.

Chapter 5 offers a brief overview of the social and political scene in Asheville for those living on the margins and describes several themes that emerge from my participation in the Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective (ARMHC). I use the term *emotional ecology* to describe the milieu of mutual aid practices in which issues of authenticity, tolerance for others' madness, reflexivity, and instability play out on and offline. This chapter also discusses the dangers of performing madness online, alongside the potential barriers to engaging within particular media and this community as a whole. Throughout, I share my reflections as a student researcher and an engaged ethnographer grappling with my own emotional and mental limitations in caring for my research participants and friends. In light of their great need for social support, the events that led to a temporary collapse of the ARMHC and its reformation in March 2015 is worth

noting, and as conversations for the future of the group play out online, it remains to be seen how attendees will come together once again.

Chapter 6 makes a visual argument about the lives of images that take on as research participants and I (re)appropriate photographs and videos we have made together in our social media practice. I also included images that portray the instability of TIP's website and staff as well as images that contextualize research conducted within particular places and environments. Throughout these images, tensions within the neoliberalization and technologization of the self are self-evident, as they and those they portray can be seen as both forms of resistance against even while being co-opted within such instrumentalizing forces.

Finally, I conclude by revisiting the myth of Icarus and contemplating the inevitability of loss and death among those who strive to be mad together. Within the instability of technology and our inability to trust it wholeheartedly (just as we do not trust our mental states from betraying us), we seek to find other sources to tether us together and prevent us from falling to the depths of the ocean; yet it is because of the very futility about staving off death that TIP becomes a precious endeavor—to grasp at the fragility of being mad together, even while becoming undone by it.

## A Brief Interlude

Technologies we use in an attempt to control madness are everywhere, quite literally and tangibly embedded in the chaotic earth in which we dwell together. Although I have perhaps all-too-readily priviledged human narratives in this dissertation, I would like to pause for a moment to offer to readers a relevant backdrop to the stories I will tell about humans and technology hereafter: Our bodies absorb only a fraction of the chemicals we ingest, and as psycho-pharmaceuticals have become more prevalent in the

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last several decades, they have entered waterways through waste and improper disposal. Current purification systems in water treatment facilities cannot remove all the medications our bodies excrete and those we flush down our toilets. In one study, researchers found substantial traces of anti-depressant medications in the brain tissues of fish swimming in the waters of a waste treatment plants.[39] In another study, pharmaceutical contamination has directly contributed to the rise of intersex fish inhabiting the polluted waters of the Potomac River.[40] We are changing the chemistry of the world, just as our environments shape and are shaped in and through the ways we perceive and engage with it.[41]

Likewise, as anthropogenic changes impact other life forms and environments, our surroundings continue to affect us as well (See Figure 2). One example of this feedback loop can be seen with the rise of agriculture and the domestication of cats. As these animals have become more popular within homes, a parasite they carry in their gut—*Toxoplasmosis gondi*, the most common parasite within developed countries—has been linked to significantly higher rates of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder compared to populations without extensive childhood exposure to cats.[42] Recent studies have revealed correlations between introducing healthy bacteria fauna in the intestine and staving off depressive moods, and in preliminary findings, researchers have shown an

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[39] Harvard Health Publications, "Drugs in the Water," June 1, 2011, accessed April 29, 2015, http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/drugs-in-the-water.

[40] Ibid.

[41] In a literature review of attitudes towards mental states and interactions in the more-than-human world, Bosnian and Herzegovinan-based scholars Slobodan Loga and Bojan Sosic describe studies on popular attitudes and scientific research concerning the affect of celestial influences (e.g. the moon and planets), other abiotic factors (e.g. electromagnetic waves, heat waves, climate change, mercury exposure, and urban vs. rural stressors), as well as potential nutritional factors in regulating moods. See Slobodan Loga and Bojan Sosic, "Environment and Mental Health," *Psychiatria Danubina* 24, no. 3 (2012): 272-276.

[42] Amy Kraft, "Cat Parasite Linked to Mental Illness, Schizophrenia," *CBS News*, June 5, 2015, accessed June 8, 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cat-parasite-toxoplasma-gondii-linked-to-mental-illness-schizophrenia.

unexpected relationship between organism that reside within the gut and the brain.[43]

Another example is found within areas of higher traces of naturally-occurring Lithium in the water. Many researchers believe this element has a direct correlation with lower rates of criminality, suicides, and dementia within their population.[44] Such studies indicate that there indeed may be something in the water and that elemental changes writ large can impact ecological systems that extend far beyond the lives of humans and other animals. Because technologies for altering our mental states and measuring the effects of substances upon bodies are so pervasive, we must think more deeply about the visible and invisible tools that affect all of us who are mad enough to continue living in this world together.

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[43] Mandy Oaklander, "Can Probiotics Improve Mood?" *Time Magazine*, April 10, 2015, accessed July 17, 2015. http://time.com/3817375/probiotics-depression/.

[44] Anna Fels, "Should We All Take a Bit of Lithium?," *New York Times*, September 13, 2014, accessed April 29, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/opinion/sunday/should-we-all-take-a-bit-of-lithium.html?_r=0.

## Chapter 1: Theorizing Environ(mental) Niches within Posthuman Emotional Ecologies

In this chapter, I draw from scholarship in cultural ecology, phenomenology, feminist science and technology studies, and mad studies to situate diverse mental states within an ecological framework that attends to digital spheres as a part of the natural world. By framing mental states within *technogenesis* as the evolution, instability, and dynamism of digital and analog entanglements, this chapter analyzes writings of madness from two contributors to TIP and tracks a new type of psychiatric resistance based in new technologies—one that is not simply opposed to psychiatric paradigms for treating "mental illness" as such. FarAway and Faith Rhyne, as participants within TIP, discuss their lived experiences with madness in online spaces; and their writings serve as examples to describe my theorization of the personal *enivron(mental) niches* that are formed within larger *emotional ecologies*. In analyzing their writings, I argue that radical mental health communities like TIP aim to "*uncivilize*" madness by expressing mental distress through more expansive frameworks than biopsychiatry and by asserting a non-technical control of socially mediated technologies. And in their endeavors to recoup a more diverse language and way of being with madness, TIP can be viewed in *posthuman* terms, in ways that both recognize the interconnectivity of humans and technology as a part of larger ecological systems.

### A NOTE ON UNCIVILIZED LANGUAGE

To speak differently about mental illness, I must also offer a lexicon for situating madness within environ(mental) niches, technogenesis, and emotional ecologies within the state and process of being posthuman.[45] In so doing, madness can be further

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[45] Social theorist Donna Haraway advocates for a "heteroglossia" of languages to counter the regimenting (neoliberalizing) forces of post-industrial society; and in her

complicated, reclaimed, and uncivilized itself. To begin, the practice of uncivilizing, as

defined by The Dark Mountain Project,[46] is one that involves the "stripping away of

forms of thinking and ways of seeing which might be termed 'civilised'—those

associated, for example, with the illusion of control, the restriction of reality to that which

can be measured and managed, disconnection from nature, the enthronement of a

particular kind of rationality over other ways of knowing and feeling."[47] As Chapter 3

will show, histories of psychiatric resistance reveal the many critiques psychiatry has in

faced in its endeavors to civilize madness, delineate the normal from the pathological,

and assert control over certain bodies in the name of security, productivity, and health.

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theorization of cyborgs, she provides a framework to think beyond past notions of the
transcendent Universal Man and find unconventional significations that open up more
ontological possibilities:

> Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have
> explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common
> language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist
> speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right.
> It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships,
> space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg
> than a goddess.

Moving away from divisive categorizations of man/female, heterosexual/homosexual,
master/slave, self/other, organism/machine, animal/human, mind/body, nature/culture,
subject/object, individual/society, physical/nonphysical, life/death, inventive languages can
allow us to think differently—quite literally—in other terms and in other ways as we also
inhabit different modes of being. The hybridization of language(s) thus mimics the
entanglement of subjectivity, materiality, and digitality and opens up another creative space
for inventive languages to flourish. See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science,
Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late 20th Century" in *The International
Handbook of Virtual Learning Environments*, ed. Joel Weiss, Jason Nolan, Jeremy
Hunsinger, and Peter Trifonas (New York, NY: Springer, 2006), 147, and Lewis, "Prozac
and the Post-human Politics of Cyborgs."

[46] The Dark Mountain Project, which could be considered as a sister movement to
The Icarus Project, fosters alternative ways of approaching ecological activism in a manner
that does not deny the anthropomorphic destruction that has already been incurred upon the
planet.

[47] The Dark Mountain Project, "Frequently Asked Questions," accessed March 6,
2015, http://dark-mountain.net/about/faqs.

In recognizing psychiatric interventions as a particular rationality among many, TIP destabilizes civilizing priorities and respects self-determination in the engagement and disengagement of psychiatric and psychological interventions. While many Icarus contributors have found relief through the use of psycho-pharmaceutical interventions and other bio-psychiatric technologies, they also experienced the limitations of medical paradigms to recognize the fullness of their lives. Many feel as that such paradigms all-too-often focus on a narrow lens of neurochemical imbalance in the brain as exhibited through abnormal behavior. Alternatively, Icarus contributors frequently adopt alternative words and phrases beyond bio-psychiatric terms to describe their mental states such as "neurodivergent processing," "diasporas of distressing symptoms,"[48] "sensory/cognitive/emotional trauma," or "cognitive-emotional terror."[49] "Bipolar disorder" is interchangeable with *highs and lows*; "psychosis" can be seen as a *reckoning*[50]; and psychiatrists could label *extreme experiences* as symptoms of "psychosis" (such as hearing voices others do not hear or seeing objects others do not see). Such words and phrases do not diminish the utility of bio-psychiatric terminology nor do they directly undermine medical treatment options, yet they allow for a range of descriptors and call for attention to individual needs and desires. They call us to listen to the forces at work within communities and to reevaluate the languages that enframe mental illness as such. Attentiveness to language, the process of learning to listen to personal stories, and the intensive force conveyed through community—these are all things that call to be named differently. For this reason, I also draw from TIP's growing

[48] Faith Rhyne, "Re: Schizophrenia as Traumatized Synesthesia," February 28, 2012, accessed January 7, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=26264&p=229672#p22967.

[49] Faith Rhyne, "Re: Schizophrenia as Traumatized Synesthesia," February 29, 2012, accessed January 7, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=26264&p=229672#p22966.

[50] Faith Rhyne, "The New Word for 'Psychosis' is Reckoning," June 2006, http://cloudcalling.blogspot.com/2012/06/new-word-for-psychosis-is-reckoning.html, accessed on January 7, 2015.

lexicon of alternative phrases and words such as *diverse mental states* and *sensitivities* to describe emotional struggles, experiences of nonconsensus realities, and points of heightened (or diminished) mental and physical energy.[51]

Secondly, such diversity of language uncivilizes madness by finding powerful metaphors of interconnectivity and mutual aid within the natural world and by drawing inspiration from a sensuous engagement with the wild. Influenced by permaculture and sustainable ecology movements, Sascha Altman DuBrul writes,

> In old forests everything is connected, from the moss and lichens to the ferns and brambles to the birds and beetles. In our human minds we separate all the parts of the forest into separate pieces when a lot of the time it can be more helpful to view the forest as one giant organism with separate parts all working together. The trees of a forest intertwine their roots and actually communicate with each other underground. You see it most visibly along ravines and creek beds where a cut-away hillside reveals totally asymmetrical tangle of roots that no scientist could ever have imagined or planned out with all his laws of physics. Something in that tangle explains how those trees can lean out at all kinds of gravity-defying angles and hang their necks into the strongest winds and still survive, bending but not breaking, adapting with unpredictable curves and angles to the way the world breathes and shines and rains and burns. Concrete can't do that. There are a lot of lessons to be learned from the way life evolves and gets stronger in the wild. Something about the living architecture of chaos and time, multi-tiered forests and microscopic algae, outlasts any of the straight lines and square institutions we're told to believe in.[52]

Subverting the monocrop culture of psychiatric practice, DuBrul's rich narrative demonstrates a deep sensitivity to the inner workings of profoundly complex ecosystems and an understandable skepticism towards the logics and linearity of bureaucratic

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[51] This phrase seeks to go beyond biopsychiatric models and the Mad Pride Movement for framing mental states. It does not try to recuperate *madness*, but points to another way of framing peculiar behavior. When I use the term *mad*, I do so to illustrate the way many Icarus members self-identify and choose to reclaim that term. Still, other Icarus members, like FarAway, dislike the term *mad* and prefers instead to use the phrase "extreme mental states" to describe their experiences.

[52] DuBrul, "The Icarus Project," 269.

structures, such as those underlying much of medicine. TIP challenges the desire to psychiatrize thought patterns, speech, and behavior and premises divergent language as integral to a more nuanced depiction of our worldly interactions and their complex relationship to diverse mental states.

Furthermore, Bradley Lewis, in his theorization of semiotic realism, suggests that language and our interpretation of it has real effects in the world around us. He notes, "Interpreter's interests are based on their attendance to different aspects of the data, which means that interests, desires, and consequences partly determine what counts as legitimate knowledge" and that "the interpretations we choose and the knowledge-making communities we join determine who we become and the kind of life-worlds we create."[53] Likewise, alternative language beyond the biomedical paradigm of mental illness can open up a diversity of paradigms. Moreover, it can create a reflective space for those with mental suffering (and for their health care providers) to see themselves outside of a medical identity, reevaluate their self-care regimens, advocate for the care they would like to receive, and connect to others who may have similar concerns about ascribing to solely psycho-pharmaceutical interventions.

## A Phenomenological Approach to Narratives of Madness

In uncivilizing madness, reality is not restricted to that which can be controlled, measured, and managed; and through a phenomenological understanding of lived experience, mad realities or nonconsensus realities are validated over and against the possibility that those realities may not inhabited by others. Such a perspective does not romanticize the real suffering of those who struggle with intense mental states, nor diminishes the real alienation that those with such states may feel. Instead, a phenomenological approach to personal narrative recognizes the importance of listening

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[53] Lewis, *Moving beyond Prozac,* 33-34.

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to stories of madness with the understanding that their author's realities take shape within the world around them.

Kevin Aho, positing a hermeneutic phenomenology of mental illness writes,

> Phenomenology acknowledges that emotions and behavior are always shaped by the socio-historical context in which the patient is actively engaged, and as a result, the patient cannot be regarded as a self-contained biological body separate and distinct from her/his context. This recognition allows psychiatry to shift its standpoint from that of neutral, detached observer to one drawn into the illness itself, into the complex, situated experiences of mental suffering, as it is being lived and described by the patient.[54]

This phenomenological perspective pushes against the subject-object binary by drawing the observer/psychiatrist "into the illness itself" and grounds "complex, situated experiences of mental suffering" within the continual effects of the "outside" world on one's "inner" states. In this manner, Aho challenges that false binary to embrace the notion that our engagement in the world always already affects and is being affected by our mental states.

## Diverse Mental States in Environ(mental) Niches

Within Phenomenology and Feminist Science and Technology Studies, an emphasis on situated knowledge reveals the spaces in which their narratives are taken seriously.[55] Likewise, a phenomenology of diverse mental states can also serve to contextualize one's unique position and function within a vibrant community. And through the dynamism of experiences within the material world and its constant

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54 Kevin Aho, "Medicalizing Mental Health: A Phenomenological Alternative," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 29, no. 4 (December 2008): 248.

55 See Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575-599.

interpretation by those with diverse mental states and those engaging with them, an *environ(mental) niche* forms.

As opposed to one's habitat (which is a descriptor of place), a *niche* refers to how an organism engages in its world.[56] Here, I define an environ(mental) niche as the phenomenological interpretation of one's surroundings that affect an individual's corporeal ontology and epistemology; and I incorporate ecologists Micahel Begon et. al.'s explanation of a niche is an multidimensional concept, one that is "defined by the boundaries that limit where it [a species] can live, grow and reproduce." If we are to consider which lives can live and flourish (beyond base reproductive capabilities), it is important to note whose lives are precariously held within the land of the living—those whose lives are at the limits of collapse.

My emphasis on the *(mental)* effects from one's environ(mental) niche serves to address mental states as embodied realities within social determinates of health. This emphasis is not meant to reify Cartesian dualism of the mind as separate from the body nor to deny the effects of psycho-pharmaceuticals in blunting, alleviating, or abating extreme mental states for those who utilize such interventions, but to claim the deep connection between societal stressors and individual suffering as a material experience and to validate the situated knowledges of those who have felt deeply harmed by those and other psychiatric methods to stabilize moods.[57] An environ(mental) niche—as an understanding of oneself in relation to others and nature—can encompass pharmaceutical intervention as an object or artifact within a host of other factors that contribute to how one thinks, feels, and otherwise engages in the world.

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[56] Michael Begon, Colin R. Townsend, and John L. Harper. *Ecology from Individuals to Ecosytems*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 31.

[57] I consider mental suffering to be a deeply embodied experience, such that it cannot be separated from the bodily pain and ache of sadness, lack of energy needed to lift a spoon to one's lips or get out of bed, a racing heart from a heightened fear, impulsive sexuality that can accompany more frenzied periods, and exhausted restlessness that can arise from a lack of sleep.

Here, I draw from the work of social epidemiologist Nancy Kreiger and her theorization of an "ecosocial" framework for "developing new insights into determinants of population distributions of disease and social inequalities in health."[58] To that end, Krieger theorizes an "evolving bush of life intertwined at every scale, micro to macro, with the scaffolding of society that different core social groups daily reinforce or seek to alter."[59] Such an approach does not deny the possibility of internal causation for pathology, not does it deny the political economy in which certain illness become more prevalent. Rather, within an environ(mental) niche, an individual's biology and relationship to resources, pathogens, and other geographic and biotic factors greatly influences her ability to interpret appropriate responses to a particular habitat and how she comes to thrive or adapt to that place. Likewise, an individual's environ(mental) niche finds substance and sustenance through her engagement in the world and continues to emerge in relation to a perpetual bombardment of stimuli and lenses through which to understand them.

In *Mad Travelers*, philosopher Ian Hacking describes the manifestation of mental illness within certain environments, stating,

> …one fruitful idea for understanding transient mental illness is the ecological niche, not just social, not just medical, not just coming from the patient, not just from the doctors, but from the concatenation of an extraordinarily large number of diverse types of elements which for a moment provide a stable home for certain types of manifestations of illness."[60]

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58 Nancy Krieger, "Theories for Social Epidemiology in the 21st Century: An Ecosocial Perspective," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 30, no. 4 (August 30, 2001): 668-677.

59 Ibid., 671.

60 Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illness* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 13.

Expanding on Hacking's argument for the social construction of mental illness and moving past psychiatrized language of mental diagnoses, I refer to one's thoughts, behaviors, and practices as constitutive of an environ(mental) niche. [61] Such a niche cultivated by psychosocial dynamics (on and offline), societal stressors,[62] intellectual climates, and politico-economic forces that take shape and thrive. To that end, one's unique relationship to structural forces, one's interpretation of such changing surroundings, and the meaning-making that comes from articulating one's experience can be both an affective experience—one that is pre-cognitive, pre-verbal, bodily, ephemeral, yet material,[63] and one that is also entangled within narrative, imbued with meaning, and caught up within dynamic narrative structures, including those based within socially mediated forms of technology.[64]

## Technogenic Approaches to Madness

During my time with those in TIP, I found that their environ(mental) niches include many digital spheres, as the Internet extends their habitat to interface with many others who share similar sensitivities and frustrations with the world around them. As Chapter 4 details, TIP first began on online forums and as social media platforms developed—the organization expanded to MySpace pages, Facebook groups, support calls, organizing calls, e-mail groups, and face-to-face meetings. Because the organization developed in and through socially mediated forms of technology, I will

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[61] Such instabilities may include accessing mental health care, nutritious food, public transportation, job opportunities, community support, etc., as well as digital volatility (bit rot, issues related to perceived anonymity, miscommunication, server dis/functions, the commodification of the Internet, etc.).

[62] Such as racism, sexism, ablism, stigma against mental struggles, neocolonialism, intergenerational trauma, toxins from environmental degradation, etc.

[63] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1.

[64] See Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

explore technogenesis as the confluence of humans and technology and discuss how TIP calls us to recognize madness in ways that traverses ecological (including digital) communities and blurs what it means to be "human" within more-than-human networks.

Describing the insidious expansion of technology within our lives and the inherent instability of the cybernetic culture, digital theorist Sadie Plant poetically explains,

> The influencing machines and complex communicating devices once assumed to be products of the schizophrenic imagination are now installed in every home, flush with everybody, interlinked with all the relays, nets, and thinking machines…A telecommunicating, cybernetic culture with its own hidden hands and runaway effects, checks, balances, and unprecedented fluctuations. A patchwork culture of short term memories and missing records, conflicting histories and discontinuous samples, strands of the narrative pulled out of time. A volatile, highly strung, and sensitive system, susceptible to opportunistic infections and imperceptible mutations, spontaneous emergences and sudden new lives.[65]

In many ways, TIP embodies Plant's description of our brave new world of "unprecedented fluctuations" and "spontaneous emergences." Through a closed Facebook group of over 4,000 members, an active online forum, and local Icarus groups, common topics within these digital and analog spaces frequently include conversations about how tailor or adapt one's environ(mental) niche by finding community, tapering off psycho-pharmaceutical drugs, trying alternative or complementary approaches, and providing mutual aid. Despite their instability, these spaces also allows for discussion about larger global concerns such as the prevalence of monoculture, increased pollution, and anthropogenic climate change. Moreover, their presence has real effects in the material word: Icarus contributors have talked with me about the affective responses to

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[65] Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture* (London, UK: Fourth Estate, 1997), 136-137.

seeing compassionate words addressed to them through their computer screens and tangible consequences of regularly meetings with those who similarly struggle. They form friendships. They organize. They fundraise for each other. They find a sense of solidarity and community. And at times, some contributors are left feeling further alienated, invalidated, and unsupported on such analog and digital spaces.

The lens of technogenesis—the co-evolution of humans and technology—illuminates the extension of diverse mental states online. Comparative media scholar N. Katherine Hayles details social changes within cognition, language process, and attention span and the rise of technological inventions from the telegraph to the Internet.[66] From her historical and literary analysis, Hayles argues that "epigenetic changes in human biology can be accelerated by changes in the environment that make them even more adaptive, which leads to further epigenetic change."[67] She goes on to suggest that neural plasticity—through use of technology—can change the very way we think: "Because the dynamic involves causation that operates through epigenetic changes, which occur much faster than genetic mutations, evolution can now happen much faster, especially in environments that are rapidly transforming with multiple factors pushing in similar directions."[68] From this perspective, TIP's online spaces—as with many other social media sites—literally can become something to think *with,* and through which certain emotional and intellectual environ(mental) niches are formed. Thus, an individual's ontology and epistemology is transformed in relation to others and to alternative conceptualizations of mental illness.

Plant, drawing from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, attends to the embodied materiality of cybernetic communication, and—like Hayles—contextualizes

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[66] See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[67] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012),10.

[68] Ibid., 10-11.

the technogenesis of the mind within larger social spheres. She writes, "This is not a brain opposed to the body. This brain is body, extending even to the fingertips, through all the thinking, pulsing, fluctuating chemistries, and virtually interconnected with the matters of other bodies, clothes, keyboards, traffic flows, city streets, data streams. There is no immateriality."[69] In this way, technogenesis does not fall into the trap of reifying mind-body dualism but creates a synthesis between the brain, body, and technology.

Articulating this hybridization of neural networks, Plant goes on to state,

> Nature and culture, essence and construction, growth and learning all become matters of degree. Some of them are old and apparently fixed; others are new and apparently contrived. But all of them are syntheses, more or less locked in place and liable to move. As for the boundaries between individuated neural nets, once they escape the trunks of the trees, there's no end to the connections they can make.[70]

Plant's understanding of technogenesis thus makes apparent the deep entanglement of our minds and bodies within dynamic digital communities and other evolving systems. As alternative language for describing diverse mental states emerges on analog and digital forums like TIP, the chatter of information, mutual support, and resistance against biopsychiatry as the sole arbiter of "appropriate" treatment have material effects in the world. Their emphasis on narrative ways of understanding lived experience draws from a plethora of environ(mental) niches creates a feedback loop in which an Icarus contributor reinterprets her own narratives, opinions, and beliefs in relation to peers and allows certain conceptions about herself and others to gain sway and flourish in her own environ(mental) niche.

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[69] Plant, *Zeros and Ones,* 167.
[70] Ibid., 169.

## Case Studies of FarAway and Faith Rhyne

With this theoretical framework, we can then approach two narratives of madness written by FarAway and Rhyne, both of whom question the origin story of their mental illness diagnoses and pointedly stray from bio-psychiatric terminology to take more storied approaches in representing their lived experiences with diverse mental states. Their phenomenological perspectives of diverse mental states and sensitivities—as revealed through their writings—posits ways of knowing and being that deviate from traditional bio-psychiatric interpretations of symptoms of mental illness.

In September 2014, FarAway joined TIP's online forum, a relatively anonymous digital space where contributors can start discussion threads, comment on each others' posts, and blog about their lives. Since creating an account, FarAway has been an active presence on the site with almost four posts a day.[71] FarAway resides in a small town in the European countryside, where there is little community support for alternative understandings of intense mental states. She is thirty-nine years old, lives with her parents, and has received social support for the last several months. On the forum, she has been known for her cheerful demeanor and for her encouragement and support of others, myself included.[72] Her work as an environmental activist also plays a significant part of her online identity on the forums, and on one of my research discussion threads, she mentions her appreciation of the commonalities and sense of camaraderie she finds on the forum.

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[71] The Icarus Project, "Membership List," accessed February 10, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/memberlist.php?mode=viewprofile&u=64489.

[72] When I first started participating on the boards as a student researcher, FarAway became a friendly presence online as I met initial resistance or skepticism to my goals of conducting a digital ethnography.

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Through FarAway's account on the forum, we can begin to see how the pressures she felt to perform in particular ways or adhere to societal standards—in part—created a sense of existential anxiety. FarAway writes,

> I got back/neck problems from too much researching on the computer, and a small 'accident', and was in distress, I was also too late and had too little knowledge and power to 'stop' the incinerator. *But how to live in a more environmentally friendly way and make less waste (ideally 'zero waste') etc?*
>
> I started researching all that and it was way more fascinating than any work I have done before. But I did not have a 'job' (and therefore landed the diagnosis of 'schizophrenia', when troubles appeared). Nor did I want one, cause I felt I couldn't be as free as an independent researcher/activist . . . I did some environmental activism and it led me to believe that 'they' were listening to me on the phone. It is possible. It could also be an early sign of 'illness'.
>
> When I went for a walk past nearby power lines which were being built, a small airplane sometimes flew over me. (There was a big campaign against a new coal power plant being built at the time.) But somehow I later started thinking 'they' were monitoring me via planes. *(Maybe they were, or maybe it was just a metaphor for surveillance we're under anyway.)* Maybe it was just that few times by the power lines. I was also talking to world politicians and 'secret services' on the phone (while it was turned off), like it was a voice recorder. (It is technically possible that they listen to one if the battery is still in the phone, I read it online, the listening to phones was in newspapers too.) *I don't know if they listened to me or not, but on the odd chance they really did....?*[73]  (emphasis added)

Moreover, FarAway's unease about the world and her desire for environmental and social justice[74] only increased in intensity as her worries of environmental degradation, aversion

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[73] FarAway, "Environmental Stress/Collapse and Extreme Mental States," October 15, 2014, accessed February 10, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=41&t=35869&p=313828#p313828.

[74] Here we can think of Jonathan Metzl's use of the term *protest psychosis*, referring to schizophrenia's shift from being seen as an affliction common to white, upper-middle class women in the 1940s and 1950s towards a much more negative, chronic disease state that young black men were deemed to have during the Civil Rights movement and beyond. The caricature of the schizophrenia became one of violence, disruption, and subversion, as blacks in the U.S. fought for social equality. I suggest that we can think of a protest psychosis in

to participating in the perpetuation of problems caused by capitalism (yet sensing the judgment of others for not having a job and contributing to the economy), and beliefs of increased surveillance gained strength. This unease escalated into hearing voices, visions, and belief in her telepathic abilities and caused others to believe that she was delusional. The quote above illustrates the way that FarAway came to make meaning from her experiences; and through her prose online in which she discusses her attempt to live with an awareness of her ecological footprint, she shows rational aspects to what her psychiatrist determined was "paranoid schizophrenia," a diagnosis which FarAway still finds problematic and unhelpful. On the Icarus message board, she recognizes how her delusions became terrifying, even dangerous, to herself and others yet also imagines how "mental illness" could be seen differently as a harbinger—perhaps as a canary in an imploding mine of ecological destruction. Furthermore, in posting her writings in a forum where others can read and respond, she invites others to comment on her words and to share their own stories. This feedback loop between writer and her audience further blur the lines between madness and a singular form of rationality by illuminating the phenomenological experience of diverse mental states, revealing vast number of ways to (re)present and (re)interpret such experiences online, and calling others to provide commentary .

From corresponding with FarAway on the message boards and from reading her other posts on TIP forum, I learned that she understands her diverse mental states as stemming, in part, from the distress she has felt being in a world of environmental crises, politico-economic turmoil, and other stressors. She talks about her experiences of psychosis as magical and terrifying—she heard voices and thought she was being

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relation FarAway's experience as a way of to explore how those deemed "mad" may—at times—become fixated by the deep wrongs of the world, yet whose behavior in protest of such wrongs becomes read as pathological by medicine and the state. See Jonathan Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2009).

observed. Grappling with her diagnosis of schizophrenia, FarAway writes about a conversation with her psychiatrist, who recommends she stay on a low dose anti-psychotic:

> I asked my psychiatrist today how come I got this diagnosis if I only heard voices for 2-3 months, and she started about 'positive' and 'negative symptoms' - basically because I was job-free for 8 years ('and you are so highly educated and intelligent', she didn't want to listen that I was volunteering and doing things on the internet a lot), and - as mum said of what they asked the parents - possibly also because I didn't socialize so much anymore (almost everyone got married and had kids! Plus my friends live all over the country!) and because of extreme hair-care which involved no actual washing for a few years - I was enthusiastic about the approach for environmental reasons!
>
> She said I wasn't 'functional' and now I am?? I have very similar lifestyle. And since I'm waiting for vocational rehabilitation, she sees this as 'progress' - yes, waiting to work for 6 hours a day for 300 euro a month is 'progress' (when you can get almost as much for sitting at home, yikes!)
>
> She said my diagnosis was all according to DSM and our country's 'manual'. Of course I could offer no clear counter-arguments there, haven't studied those, she also said I was a 'classic case' and 'everyone agreed on the diagnosis'... And how my prognosis was good, and how lucky I am to be okay with only one 'low dose' med... I did get a bit teary-eyed due to frustration, basically you can't get anywhere with being skeptical.[75]

FarAway clearly recognizes the external factors that contributed to her pathologization—unpaid activist endeavors, little social interaction, alternative hygiene practices, and few economic incentives to find vocational placement. Yet, when her modes of being became tumultuous, her health care provider interpreted her lifestyle as indicative of chronic pathology. In looking back at her extreme state, she saw her experiences being less clearly defined. Within her phenomenological understanding of madness, such manners

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[75] FarAway, "Environmental Stress/Collapse and Extreme Mental States," October 14, 2014, accessed January 7, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=41&t=35869&start=20#p313715.

of behavior held a certain logic and validity, that go beyond a simplistic rendering of her

fixation on our anthropogenic impact as "unhealthy" catastrophizing thinking. And in the

horror and enchantment she felt during her period of psychosis, she sees much of her

behavior through the lens of alternative lifestyle choices purposefully made with the goal

of ecological conservation in mind.

<div align="center">…</div>

Faith Rhyne, one of my first contacts from TIP, was a strong advocate in my

gaining entry into The Icarus Project and conducting fieldwork with ARMHC, one of its

local groups in Asheville, North Carolina. Rhyne, whom I now consider a good friend, is

in her late 30s, often facilitates Icarus meetings in Asheville, and blogs about what she

calls "cloudcalling"—seeing what she thinks of as God in the contortions of cloud

formations during her most euphoric states.[76] Although she admits she was "losing her

mind" during the times she thought she was in communion with the clouds and exhibited

what she describes as "textbook definitions of psychotic behavior," that fact does not

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[76] Faith serves as a long-time facilitator of the Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective and currently is collating material from her blog to write an auto-ethnography in fulfillment of a masters' degree. Defining "cloudcalling" to her blog readers, she writes,

> Around the time I really began to lose my mind, I had started to notice that the forms assumed by the clouds seemed to look a lot like letters, or parts of letters. They also looked, at times, like faces, holding something of a universally recognized composition, a ratio between negative space and positive space, a relation between forms and structures. I saw, also, that the edges of the condensed cloudforms were sometimes sharp, as if being held back or cut cleanly by something I could not see. Because of my state of mind during the time I was making these initial observations, I immediately concluded that maybe something like what we think of as God was at work. I wondered why it seemed like the clouds were responsive to my attention and my focus, why the more I looked at them and the more I allowed myself to be amazed by what I saw and what it told me of how the universe works that the more fantastic and telling the shapes became, shifting into vaguely familiar symbol and what looked to be stories, of animals and wars and great waves and howling faces and shards of light upon birds with wings outstretched.

See Faith Rhyne, "What is Cloudcalling?," accessed February 1, 2015, http://proofofgodandothertragedies.net/what-is-cloudcalling/.

diminish the sense of transcendence she felt in nature, staring at the clouds and reading their patterns. She writes,

> I tried (under professional advice) to think ~ "they're only clouds." ~ but that made the world feel like a cold, dead place. I have watched the sky and I have loved the sky since I was a child.  The flood of clarity that it inspires, the profound love for the timelessness of sky and distance and wind and shapes...all of it is vital.[77]

Professional mental health care workers have suggested she temper the animistic beliefs that she feels while observing the natural world; but she remains unwilling to reconcile the "rationalist" perspective on the clouds with her long-held practice to read the sky as text and wonder at its beauty. For her, cloud-calling as an open-ended epistemology and ontology, one that invites multiple interpretations and allows for multiple truths to coexist and one in which one's relationship to the clouds can be continually negotiated and transformed.

At an ARMHC meeting, she discussed her blog—a collection of correspondence, poetry, photography, sketches, journal entries, and other reflections—as complicating distinctions between madness and sanity (See Figure 16). For her, creative writing and online expression were strategies to stay sane through a contentious divorce, to prove her own existence, to theorize clouds as proof of a god's existence, and to reach out to others who may be going through similar states. She saw the blog as an integral part of her existence, a lifeline, a way to offer hope to others and a distress signal to send for help and support. Yet, her writings online frequently caused her family to grow alarmed with her behavior and served—in part—as a justification for the loss of custody of her children. And in recent months, her self-described paranoia of employers reading her

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[77] Faith Rhyne, "The Latest in Cloud X-Ray Technology," July 6, 2012, accessed January 29, 2015, http://proofofgodandothertragedies.net/2012/07/06/the-latest-in-cloud-x-ray-technology/.

blog and judging her caused her to feel great discomfort, so much so that she decided to make her blog private for a time and transition content to a new website.[78] The blog, temporarily available for public viewing, remains a digital incarnation of the parts of her that "can only exist online."[79] Rhyne acknowledges the aspects of her writing that could cause others to interpret her experiences through a bio-psychiatric lens, just as she lives with the real consequences of people not understanding her language. Still, in maintaining this space online, she very consciously plays at borders of madness and sanity and recognizes the dangerous, yet poetic possibilities when such lines are crossed.

Rhyne often e-mails herself on a Blackberry as a way to care for herself, document her life, process contradictory feelings, explore ideas, and interpret the world around her. Like Plant's analysis of brain as body, she embodies a continuity of physical, emotional, and representational (mental and technological) states. In her musings on the attunement some may have to the environment and the ways those sensitivities could easily become pathologized, she writes,

> I do think that some people with sensory processing diversity are sensitive to broad environmental currents—subtle stimuli that our brains then try to make sense of, because that's what brains do. If someone is sensitive to geomagnetism or electrical fields and they are operating under the assumption that there is something wrong with them, their interpretation of vague sensory stimuli may be fairly confusing or distressing and may manifest as psychiatric symptoms. I think this is relevant particularly in disorders that feature psychosis in which deep spiritual feelings, a sense of presence, somatic delusions, and a sense of connectedness to something unseen, etc.[80]

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[78] Faith Rhyne, "The A Key and Other Problems Now with More Solutions," January 13, 2015, accessed January 20, 2015, http://proofofgodandothertragedies.net/2015/01/13/the-a-key-and-other-problems-now-with-more-solutions/.

[79] Field notes from November 25, 2014, at Eagle Street Coffee Shop and Emporium.

[80] Faith Rhyne, "Re: Schizophrenia as Traumatized Synesthesia," February 29, 2012, accessed January 7, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=26264&p=229672#p229706 .

Here, Rhyne not only postulates on sensitivities to "environmental currents" and the manner such "symptoms" are narrowly interpreted within psychiatry; she also makes connections outside of what Plant calls "individual neural nets" to the screens of her blog followers and beyond.

As Rhyne responds to encounters with others, we can begin to see the ways her mental states become diffuse within the world around her. Responding to comments from her readers and shifts within TIP, her relationship to herself, to others, to the clouds, and to certain digital spaces changes as she evolves with socially mediated technology. For this reason, the technogenesis that occurs as she traffics through various spheres transforms her ways of knowing and being in the world enables us to see the many ways she adapts and constructs her environ(mental) niche in ways that could be considered more-than-human in nature.

## Emotional Ecologies in Posthuman Worlds

Through the stories of Faith Rhyne and FarAway, we can also see the coexistence and convergence of environ(mental) niches that Icarus Project contributors cultivate within larger ecologies of madness. And though each niche retains a unique position within such systems, something larger emerges and permeates the interpersonal and societal dynamics which co-create shared attitudes, beliefs, certain norms, and practices. Such engagements (re)instantiate feedback loops within the self a part of a community, between community leaders in relation to other members, and inside the community as they define themselves internally and to the outside world. Here, I call the dynamic cultures that arise from such interactions *emotional ecologies*, in which environ(mental) niches engage with each other and transform what it means to be mad together. Such ecologies allow us to think more expansively, even atmospherically, in more-than-

human—even posthuman—terms and to discuss technogenic and affective engagements in a co-constitutive manner.

Before describing the emotional ecologies that take shape within TIP, we must first understand their mad community as a posthuman endeavor within larger ecological systems. To this end, Hayles' theorization of the posthuman describes unions of humans and technology and details the implications of their social reality and materiality within state and process of being human. Affirming the very material world around us as well as the material affects of technologies constituting the digital world, Hayles provides the following definition of the posthuman:

> First, the posthuman view privileges information pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity…as an epiphenomenon… Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth… the posthuman view configures human beings so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.[81]

In Hayles' definition of this movement, posthumans' connection to the digital world makes it possible for organisms to lose their traditional boundaries and borders as they seep into and co-create nature and technology. In their materiality, they remain permeable, fluid, and hybrid, affected by the prosthetic forces around it, affecting the world around it, and deeply enmeshed within technological networks and flows.[82]

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[81] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman,* 2-3.

[82] Moreover, as the co-evolution of posthumans and technology continues, languages, subjectivities, materialities, spatialities, temporalities, ontologies, and

Likewise, contributors to TIP act in posthuman ways as they attend to representing their

emotions online and extending themselves and their affects through keyboards, servers,

Facebook, and other forms of socially mediated technology. In such digital spaces,

information patterns—the words on a screen that provide support—have more immediacy

than the embodied strangers typing out sentences of encouragement. And within those

affective flows of information, those with diverse mental states co-mingle with cybernetic

mechanisms to become something more-than-human.

Secondly, posthumans can be seen as both extending themselves through

technology and extending themselves through the dissolution of strict demarcations

between humans and the rest of the natural world. In recognizing animal, plant, and

atmospheric prostheses—alongside our digital ones—we can further trouble what it

means to be alive in a posthuman world. Moreover, we can come to understand TIP as an

uncivlizing project that allows for the diversity of digital and analog life to live wildly in

ways that recognize our interdependent relationships to the natural world. Theorizing

posthumans within ecological communities, Mick Smith describes the inseparability of

humans from the rest of the natural world. He writes,

> A posthumanist notion of ecological community emphasizes the myriad ways that
> beings of all kinds, including human individuals and collectives, interact to create,
> sustain, and/or dissolve communities. The posthumanist inclusion of human
> activities with/in ecology is not an attempt to naturalize them, reducing them to
> just a matter of biology, but nor does it seek to separate certain (social and
> cultural) fields of human action as being entirely set apart from, or superior to,
> those characterizing all other species (that is, it seeks to weaken exceptionalism).
> A *post*-humanist perspective takes seriously the need to stop what [Giorgio]
> Agamben refers to as the "anthropological-machine," the constant "production" of
> absolute dividing lines between humans and the rest of the natural world. It
> recognizes "the fragility and porosity of the limit between nature and culture" not

epistemologies drift, circulate, and engender new ways of thinking about the state and
process of being human.

so as to collapse theses categories into each other (as for example, sociobiology does) but to "multiply attention to differences" at all levels.[83]

Seeking to correct the historic premise of egotistic, anthropologically machinic renderings of humans, Smith urges others to attend to the great diversity within the interactions of humans within communities far more eclectic than those made up by them. Likewise, my use of the term *emotional ecology* aims to further entrench the mental states of those within TIP within more-than-human systems and explore instances in which the porosity of humans and technology and the rest of nature diffuse through and permeate each other.[84]

In my use of the term *ecology*, I draw from the work of Ann McElroy and Patricia K. Townsend's model of an "ecology of health and disease." In the passage that follows, they outline the tenants of this model,

> First, there is no singular cause of disease. The immediate, clinically detectable stimulus for disease may be a virus, vitamin deficiency, or intestinal parasite, but disease itself is ultimately due to a chain of factors related to ecosystem imbalances. Second, health and disease develop within a set of physical, biological, and cultural subsystems that continually affect one another. Third, environment is not merely the physical habitat, the soil, air, water, and terrain in which we live and work, but also the culturally constructed environments— streets, buildings, farms and gardens, slums and suburbs. Further, people also create and live within social and psychological environments, and their perception of the physical habitat and of their proper role is influenced by social values and worldview.[85]

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[83] Mick Smith, "Ecological Community, the Sense of the World, and Senseless Extinction," *Environmental Humanities* 2 (2013): 27.

[84] Because biotic metaphors have taken root within The Icarus Project already (in their attention to wings as a technology, dandelions, forests), thinking about the organization in terms of an emotional ecology does not stray far from the way many within the group have conceptualized their community for themselves.

[85] Ann McElroy and Patricia K. Townsend, "The Ecology of Health and Disease," in *Medical Anthropology in Ecological Perspective,* 5th ed., ed. Ann McElroy and Patricia K Townsend (Philadelphia, PA: Westview Press, 2008), 1-32.

Likewise, an ecology of emotions and other mental states would not begin with the premise of a neuro-chemical imbalance and other neurological disorders in the brain, nor a flawed genetic makeup as the sole biological determinants of mental health.[86] Rather, an ecological perspective would acknowledge that the ways we interpret mental illness as biological processes are caught up within the environments we inhabit—including the political economy of our time and the science(s) we use to define the normal and treat the pathological. Therapeutic interventions, psycho-pharmaceuticals and other bio-psychiatric interviews can be seen as cultural artifacts that affect biological and cultural communities, including that of The Icarus Project; and as contributors to the Icarus Project interact with those artifacts and other objects imbued with social values within their larger communities, their interpretations of their own lifeworlds—their environ(mental) niches—are affected as well.[87]

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[86] Because there are a myriad of factors that can contribute to such habitats, McElroy and Townsend clarify that the study of such environments must be limited at some level. For while there might not be a sufficient heuristic for systematically understanding all facets that make up the way a disease presents itself, attention can be paid to particular aspects of the structure that make up one's lifeworld. Likewise, studies of multi-level causations can focus in on facets of an environment—such as the relationships between technology mental health—while maintaining the holistic perspective that there are a number of other relevant topics to explore.

[87] For example, the atmosphere itself can affect the way one phenomenologically experiences her surroundings. To this end, Brad Evans and Julian Reid describe the penetrative aspects of cultural milieus and other atmospheric conditions upon the body,

> Atmosphere is more, however, than some element that exists independently of subjects and objects. It is precisely that which connects subjects and objects in ways that give qualitative and affective meaning to relations that are wholly contingent in space and time. Indeed atmosphere is not separate from the body; it penetrates the subject to profoundly influence both our visible and material realities, along with the ephemeral conditions that affect how we see and experience the world. Such atmospheres, of course, are never universal or static.

In emphasizing the contingency and ethereality of such relationships, Evans and Reid imply that such atmospheric engagements are not easy to describe or define in any set terms. Yet this element—such as an emotional ecology—forms meaningful affective spaces and profoundly influences mental and material realities. Brad Evans and Julian Reid, *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 122.

Simultaneously, the analog and digitals spheres that those from TIP inhabit can connect to and generate from particular emotional milieus.[88] Describing places as emotionally-imbued spaces, geographer Owain Jones writes,

> Emotions are systemic and interact constantly with our conscious and unconscious selves, memories and environment; they enframe the rational and the not vice versa. So who we are and what we do at any moment is a production of the stunningly complex interplay between these processes. The emotional spatialities of becoming, the transactions of body(ies), space(s), mind(s), feeling(s) in the unfolding of life-in-the-now, are the very stuff of life we should be concerned with when trying to understand how people make sense of/practice the world.[89]

Through qualitative research into the phenomenology of interacting within such emotional spheres, we can glimpse at the iterative states which continually unfold, diversity and interplay of such atmospheres, rationalities and logics that those who interact there hold within their environ(mental) niches, and emotional ecologies that are (re)constructed by contributors to the organization. My time with TIP was a foray into such qualitative inquiry—to listen to the experiences of research participants and to gain insight into how they made meaning of the communities through which they trafficked.

TIP—with its many dispersed chapters and various digital spaces—chaotically unfolds as mental states fluctuate and as people express themselves and respond to their communities; and in recognizing their posthuman ontologies within ecological (including digital) systems, we can explore the emotional states that filter through their atmospheres,

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88 *Affect* is an immediate, precognitive, even preverbal experience. *Emotions,* however, must first be recognized by oneself in order to be expressed. They are caught up within words and communicated with others. Because emotions are more evocative in nature, I have chosen to describe emotional rather than affective ecologies.

89 Owain Jones, "An Ecology of Emotion, Memory, Self, and Landscape," in *Emotion, Place, and Culture*, ed. Mick Smith, Joyce Davidson, Laura Cameron, and Liz Bondi (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 205-206.

affect individual environ(mental) niches, and further impact the instability of their inherently instable, emotionally-vulnerable communities. For example, some Icarus contributors have started intense debates online about forced mental health treatment, involuntary commitment to psychiatric wards, self-harm, and ethical dilemmas in caring for friends who endure mental suffering, alongside other emotionally painful, "triggering" topics. Others, entering states of agitation and sleeplessness, have bombarded the site with an overwhelming number of comments on discussion threads. Many forum users noted on the board that they missed a contributor who had been a daily presence on the board's Daily Roll Call and—in response to his hospitalization in a psychiatric ward—set up a discussion thread to welcome him back when he returned. In November 2014, Icarus contributors reported the suicide of a long-term Icarus message board user who had fallen silent on the boards in the last few weeks leading up to her death. Posts in memoriam flooded the thread as people grappled with the loss in the community.[90] Through the generative acts of posting articles online, commenting on threads, attending meetings, creating events, and building communities, individual environ(mental) niches resonate and react to each other's contributions to the shared emotional ecology. As information and support are shared, the tenor of conversations changes online as well. In turn, the emotional ecology of the digital spaces also creates feedback loops that—in turn—have real impacts on contributors' environ(mental) niches; and they often find that their thoughts and emotions are affected by the (dis)connections they have with other humans and more-than-human objects. Their ontologies and epistemologies are transformed in community with those who resonate with each others' lived experience of mental suffering.

Faith Rhyne's online interactions can also been seen through the lens of posthuman emotional ecologies, as she thinks *with and against* TIP in the spaces she

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[90] Field notes from December 12, 2014, at The Icarus Project forum.

chooses to extend her environ(mental) niches. In relation to her interactions with TIP's currents, Faith initially found TIP message board to be an incredible medium to express herself and to find solidarity with other who were negotiating the effects of mental struggles in their personal and professional lives. Within a short time of her increasing involvement in c/s/x movements, TIP hired Faith part-time as a national organizer for various Icarus chapters across the United States. As a staff person, Rhyne found many of her interactions with fellow Icarus contributors changed negatively in tenor online and offline, so much so that she did not feel comfortable participating on the message boards as a peer. Over time, she began to see TIP as an anxiety-provoking, over-stimulating space, she made changes within her environ(mental) niche to find some distance from TIP. She no longer serves on the Icarus staff, and her blog remains a more solitary space for artistic, intellectual expression.

More broadly, the digital habitats where TIP has taken root have changed significantly over time. As Chapter 4 will detail, the environ(mental) niches of those long-term contributors have had to adapt to the emotional ecologies which develop amongst various socially mediated technologies. The main website—once coded in privatized software—has now shifted to an open-source coding system, which has been updated several times in the last few years. With these updates, programmers have codified the procedure for data storage, sorted through a vast menagerie of articles and files collected throughout several years, and contributed to significant aesthetic and structural shifts in the website's maintenance.[91] Additionally, the migration from TIP message board to a closed Facebook group caused controversy regarding the lack of (seeming) anonymity on Facebook and potential for data mining personal health

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[91] Jonah Bossewitch, "You are Not Alone: The Icarus Project and Psychosocial Wellbeing," (forthcoming PhD dissertation, Columbia University).

information from such a site.[92] And while Facebook provided convenience and more immediate responses than the forums, some longstanding forum contributors have noted that it also shortened the length of posts, did not protect individuals' anonymity, and failed to provide an advertisement-free space.[93] Moreover, within such posthuman entanglements, the instances of file corruption, platform incompatibility, a revolving list of programmers and forum moderators, and data loss complicate the online face of the organization and structure how conversations take place on its site. Despite this instability—and perhaps because of this instability, TIP transforms the emotional ecology within its community and co-evolve with the technologies that envelop it as contributors shift towards increasingly immediate networks of shared information.

Likewise, analog interactions often filter into digital spheres and help to constitute emotional ecologies as well. Even in the process of gaining entrance into the ARMHC, I learned about the various attitudes contributors held towards outsiders and whose voices held sway in determining my presence and role within the group—discussions of which occurred in the meetings, a closed Facebook group, and their Google Group e-mail list. Throughout my seven months of in-person fieldwork, I used the Google Group as a means to invite ARMHC attendees over to my house for potluck brunches, research updates, and focus group interviews. What is more, I found that complicated incidents that happened in our regular meetings would be discussed further on Google Group e-mails, facilitators would clarify meeting procedure, and agenda items would be put to vote. Conversations ranging from event planning to homeopathic remedies to poetry to

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[92] In one instance, an Icarus member used Facebook's censorship function to flag a comment on self-harm posted by another group member. Facebook automatically generated a response to the latter member asking them if they were contemplating self-harm and provided a number of suicide hotlines to call. Ibid.

[93] For these reasons, DuBrul asked fellow Facebook users to brainstorm strategies to move away from Facebook, either back on to the online forum (which he considers to be somewhat of a "ghost town") or to a different social media site entirely. See Sascha Altman Dubrul, Facebook status update, "Strategies for Getting off of Facebook," November 30, 2014, accessed November 30, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/sascha.DuBrul.

transportation request float through the Google Group and have real effects offline as people tried new supplements, received rides, attended get-togethers, and led meetings according to the agreed upon procedures. In addition, as Chapter 5 will detail, the weightiness of diverse mental states—particularly those of frenzied energy or suicidal ideation—can affect group dynamics significantly, as they struggle to provide peers support for one another, even while they suffer from their mental states as well. And now that I have since moved away from Asheville, my fieldwork with this community is mediated entirely through digital technology; yet through posthuman engagements of e-mail exchanges, texts, Skype meetings, and phone calls, I still feel deeply connected to my friends and research participants in Asheville. Despite physical distance, we remain connected within the emotional ecology of the group and retain a shared sense of being mad together.

## Conclusion

mania, bi-polarity; panic disorder, schizophrenia; words get tossed around too freely and make boxes too quickly. whatever it is it's a part of my struggle, a struggle that has to be taken in context: a young white American woman alive on a dying planet, a citizen in the place most responsible for modern death and destruction. is slight schizophrenia the natural response to holding two worlds in one body? there is the world that i come from, a construct of human creations, an elaborate labyrinth of manufactured distraction which, due to my globally unique position of privilege, will comfort me as the planet goes down, will gently turn my head away from the gore and close a silencing door between it and me, and offer me a latte. and then there is the world that i am made of, a world of sticks and stones and breaking bones, a wild world i am terribly estranged from. a world i remember and long for but which is separated from me by a gap grown wide from too many generations of not speaking that language. it's a painful dichotomy, a tortuous one. to know home but have no way back and no way forward. to be locked out forever. to know there was only one key and we smelt it down to make coke cans and cars. it's insane, the dichotomy. the dichotomy is crazy [sic].

In short, TIP seeks to complicate, claim, and integrate madness into what it means to be human living in a technogenic age. In its formation of radical mental health communities, new questions can be asked; and new ontologies and epistemologies for recognizing connections within analog and digital environments emerge. Those who have been interpolated by the medical gaze can explore new ways of expressing their mental states and find new language for troubling the binaries between madness and sanity, personal trouble and socio-political ills, and Humanity and Nature.

The writings of FarAway and Faith Rhyne offer a glimpse into the way some TIP contributors understand their diverse mental states and sensitivities within a host of situational stressors. Certain tensions in their narratives—either from the realities of seeing god in clouds or seeing the iCloud as a being an omniscient, omnipotent power— stem from particular locations and situations, in which some beliefs, behaviors, and traits begin to flourish; and their phenomenological experiences with madness put into relief the bio-psychiatric backdrop as a singular rationality in which certain behaviors were pathologized as psychosis. In reading their narratives, we cannot forget the realities of their mental suffering or the risk they take in sharing their thoughts about nature—which have already been pathologized as symptoms of underlying mental illness. Nevertheless, their representations of diverse mental states uncivilize madness by considering the ethical and political duties we share far beyond the reach of psychiatric mitigation. In recognizing the ways they effect others through their writings online and the ways they come to see themselves in relation to others, we can begin to enter into their perceptions of the spaces they inhabit and the pressures they feel to act in particular ways. And as

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[94] Kika Kat, "Crazy," in *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness: A Reader and Roadmap of Bipolar Worlds*, ed. Sascha Altman DuBrul and Jacks McNamara (Oakland, CA: The Icarus Project, 2013), 15.

FarAway and Rhyne make sense of the world around them and methods they engage with technology, we can become better attuned to their ways of understanding and being within the reality of anthropogenic climate change, environmental deterioration, pressures of capitalism, and the desire for greater political, social, artistic, even spiritual attention to nature, as they experience them.

Furthermore, contributors to TIP uncivilize madness by deconstructing what it means to be mentally ill in a world in which their thoughts, attitudes, and behavior are extended vastly and altered significantly in and through technology. As they foster new ways of knowing and being within their bodies and the world around them, it "makes sense" that they also represent their diverse mental states in ways that are also multidimensional, fragmented, and (ir)rational. Thus, within the realities of ecological dynamism, the potential for ecological collapse, and the "madness" of the world itself, TIP modulates and is modulated by the many trajectories and instantiations of its socially mediated technologies. And in thinking *with* TIP and allowing the community to permeate our own environ(mental) niches, we all might begin to recognize ourselves as more deeply connected to, present within, and sensitive to posthuman emotional ecologies than we first might have suspected ourselves to be.

## Chapter 2: Rooting Methods for Approaching Mad Communities

> Let's suppose that madness does not exist. If we suppose that it does not exist, then what can history make of these different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be madness? So what I would like to deploy here is exactly the opposite of historicism: not, then questioning universals by using history as a critical method, but starting from the decisions that universals do not exist, asking what kind of history we can do.
>
> —Michel Foucault[95]

I begin my chapter on research methodology with this quote because I do not assume that the histories I lay out and the data I interpret can be organized in declarative expanses of Truth. Rather, in recognizing the power dynamics at play in which narratives are told about madness (and who tells them), I describe my approach to adapt this a multi-sited ethnography to the unique dimensions and contours of the communities with whom I worked. In discussing the practice of *schizoanalysis,* research method of *bricolage*, and politics of representation, I consider the links between my theoretical framework and the approach(es) to research described here. In the same way, I explain my approach to conceptualize relationships between the self and community and articulate how thematic elements emerged within the research process. Methods rooted in grounded theory and community-based participatory research also framed selection of fieldsites and my encounters with research participants, as we negotiated our respective roles throughout my time working with TIP and the ARMHC. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the politics of representation as I wrote about local and national efforts towards mad organizing and a reflection on the benefits and limitations a schizoanalytic approach to describing mad communities.

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[95] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics,* 3.

## Schizoanalysis and Bricolage

The theory of *schizoanalysis* and the technique of *bricolage* have informed my manner of acquiring, synthesizing, and analyzing data. Delving into this research project, I could not have anticipated all the sources that have informed my writing—from discussions on TIP online forums to fieldnotes, digital correspondence and blog posts (my own and those written by Icarus Project contributors), online archives, interviews, focus groups, and images made with research participants. Neither could have I readily anticipated all the material what I would uncover nor what conclusions could be drawn from such a wide breadth of information. Despite such ambiguities to the research design and implementation, schizoanalysis and briocolage allowed me to position emerging themes within an open-ended methodological framework that could be adapted to include unanticipated sources of data.

Schizoanalysis, as theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, can be used as a way to situate organizational histories, personal narratives, and other rhizomatic connections as fragmented tales—that connect tenuously, while in other instances and places, link more firmly together. It does not assume simplistic continuities or causations within such movements, nor does it suggest a singular origin narrative with a linear, cumulative progression and a teleological trajectory.[96] Rather, this practice embraces the chaotic ties that bind individuals to societal forces and acknowledges a plethora of possible lenses into those movements (in)directly shape her lifeworld. In short, schizoanalysis is rhizomatic in nature.

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[96] For example, one rendering of The Icarus Project's trajectory could weave together historic critiques levied against psychiatry as a way to portray the organization in a heroic manner, one in which their critiques culminate to some apex of enlightened thought on madness. Such approach might reify an problematic, egotistic telos of recovery or obfuscate the emotional and financial struggles the organization faces on a daily basis.

Here, Deleuze and Guatarri's description of a rhizome "as a continuous present, something that resists a point of origin or a static past" is a helpful metaphor to think creatively about histories as "amorphous roots, flowing outward, connecting and diverging at various points."[97] Unlike arborescent forms of history (and other egotistic models of enframing the human), rhizomatic roots form horizontal links that challenge linear chronologies (which tend to provide billiard ball cause-and-effect explanations of events), binaries (mad vs. sane), dualism (mind vs. body), and unidirectional, monocrop narratives (as opposed to permacultural tales with multiple entrances and divergences). Detailing the characteristics of a rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari write,

> In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states . . . Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure. The rhizome is an antigeneology. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots."[98]

Thus, I interpret their work to mean, "There is no specific history that can be written, no beginning point . . . for they are all connected in a continually rearranging formation."[99] In this way, a schizoanalytic (rhizomatic) rendering of communities and their practices takes a posthuman approach to conceptualizing individuals as being deeply entrenched within, affected by, and diffuse throughout technology, psychiatry, social movements, and other flows and blockages that form the particular ecologies they inhabit.

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[97] Erica Fletcher, "Dis/Assembling Schizophrenia on YouTube: Theorizing an Analog Body in a Virtual Sphere," *Journal of Medical Humanities* (June 2014): 4. DOI 10.1007/s10912-014-9286-4.

[98] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (*Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

[99] Erica Fletcher, "Dis/Assembling Schizophrenia," 7.

Yet if there is no beginning point, how might we begin to contextualize TIP within larger trajectories? The practice of *schizoanalysis,* as articulated by Deleuze and Guatarri, may provide an entry into unearthing the roots of this health social movement (further discussed in Chapter 3) and sketching out trajectories for further expansion and elaboration. They define this practice as follows:

> Schizoanalysis, as the analysis of desire, is immediately practical and political, whether it is a question of an individual, group, or society. For politics precedes being. Practice does not come after the emplacement of the terms and their relations, but actively participates in the drawing of the lines; it confronts the same dangers and the same variation as the emplacement does. Schizoanalysis is like the art of the new. Or rather, there is no problem of application: the lines it brings out could equally be the lines of a life, a work of literature or art, or a society, depending on which system of coordinates is chosen.[100]

Histories and related forms of cultural representation then take on impressionist qualities, as their author must sketch or outline a fleeting political valence for certain lines and connections to emerge; and in the act of weaving interviews, digital archives, fieldnotes, photographs, and other ethnographic data together, she must recognize the partiality and incompleteness of her endeavor within this inventive space.[101]

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[100] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 203.

[101] Throughout this process, I found anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli's discussion of "sociography," to be a useful methodology for understanding the relative nature of which system of coordinates are choosen in any given ethnography. Sociography, as she defines it, runs counter to traditional anthropological modes of thick description. Rather, she places emphasis on the social through the lens of "social projects." To that end, she seeks to represent aspects of a group without entering into an articulation of individuals who constitute it. Describing sociography, Povinelli states,

> If we are interested in the spacings of the otherwise—rather than the space of the other— then we have to figure out how to write in such a way that you give enough of a world for readers to see the shape and effects of power... the intersections where there are dense threshold phenomena, you're getting a feeling of a field of force...but not so much that you trigger the colonial fantasy of capturing it, describing it, being able to hold it like a little gem in all its little differences—a bauble you can put on your dining room table.

Taking on such approach, I have structured my discussions on the role of technology and

With this in mind, I found many starting points into exploring what it means to be mad together in technogenic times; and through the method of bricolage, I brought together various forms for media and other sources of data to begin my analysis of TIP's many iterations. Bricolage, as described by Claude Levi-Strauss, is a practice done by a "bricoleur" (a bricklayer) in taking materials that are close-to-hand to accomplish an undertaking. Defining the work of a bricoleur in contrast to that of an engineer, Levi-Strauss states that the former most possess a flexibility and adaptability to knowledge-production within the set of circumstances present, while the later would come into a task with a very particular end goal in mind and the exact material, methods, and plans needed to enact her construction. He explains further,

> The 'bricoleur' is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks… The set of the 'bricoleur's' means cannot…be defined in terms of a project… It is to be defined only by its potential use…because the elements are collected or retained on the principle that 'they may always come in handy.' Such elements are specialized up to a point, sufficiently for the 'bricoleur' not to need the equipment and knowledge of all trades and professions, but not enough for each of them to have only one definite and determinate use. They each represent a set of actual and possible relations; they are 'operators' but they can be used for any operations of the same type.[102]

Within qualitative inquiry, this metaphor has been taken up with discussions of ethnographic methods as social researchers embraced more multiplicitious, eclectic, flexible designs, which in turn allowed for more nuanced, pluralistic forms of knowledge-

production to emerge in the literature.[103] How research takes shape, then, is highly

contingent on the broad skill set of the researcher and her ability to adapt to a particular

situation or scenario. Likewise, my graduate studies in medical humanities, with its

interdisciplinary base in history, philosophy, literature, art, and social science, provided

me a sufficient training to be, as Levi-Strauss describes, "specialized up to a point," but

also enabled me to serve as an "operator" of sorts in deciding which disciplinary methods

to employ as the research progressed.[104]

Additionally, as Levi-Strauss reminds, the "bricoleur" must recognize her own

perspective and abilities within the work she accomplishes. He writes,

> Further, the 'bricoleur' also, and indeed principally, derives his poetry from the
> fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he
> 'speaks' not only with things…but also through the medium of things: giving an
> account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited
> possibilities. The 'bricoleur' may not ever complete his purpose but he always
> puts something of himself into it. [105]

Similarly, my own situated understanding and modes of interpersonal engagement—as

facets of my environ(mental) niche—play a significant role in determining the methods I

use, just as they guide the analysis and conclusions that I draw as well.[106] At times, I felt

as though my own voice has played too large of a role the writing process—I worry that

my persistent use of first person is self-indulgent or overly reflexive. Yet, to speak with

and through a textual medium, I recognize the necessity of placing myself within this

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103 See Matt Rogers, "Contextualizing Theories and Practices of Bricolage Research," *The Qualitative Report* 17 no. 7 (2012): 1-17.

104 While the methods I learned in social medicine, history of medicine, and digital/visual humanities were most applicable to this project, I also found skills I learned in autobiographical narrative analysis to be a helpful "tool" in my "toolkit" for conducting this ethnography as well.

105 Ibid., 21.

106 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

dissertation and sharing my own attitudes and practices with my readers. For this reason, I preface the dissertation with a personal account of how the research topic came into being; and throughout, I often write in first person as a means to represent aspects of myself that I put into this project and to depict how emotional ecologies through which I have journeyed have profoundly impacted my own mental states as well (See Figure 3).

## Selfhood and the Limits of Storytelling

Schizoanalysis allows us to explore bodies as thresholds into psychiatric resistance, mutual aid, environ(mental) niches, and complex emotional ecologies. Indeed, artist/philosopher Jac Saorsa—drawing from Deleuze and Guattari—writes that the body is the practical object of schizoanalysis, "Where body is form and psyche is content, and equally where disease is fact and illness is experience, the context in which all meet is the existential, 'lived experience.'"[107] The body and the narratives which envelope it thus form a phenomenological understanding of their placement within their surroundings. And, as Saorsa explains, the body and being are "…produced within a socially constructed capitalist reality where all production, according to the schizoanalytic view, is at once both social production, and 'desiring-production.'"[108] The stories bodies tell about the forces wrought in and through them and the forces they themselves exert upon the world are poignant productions of how people interpret lived experiences within environ(mental) niches and emotional ecologies. What is more, as the bodies interpolate and are interpolated by technology and the rest of nature, we can begin understand them in posthuman terms within technogenic and other ecologic spheres.

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[107] Jac Saorsa, "In Response to the 'Indiscreet Questioner,'" in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Visual Art*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Lorna Collins (London, UK & New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 233.

[108] Ibid., 227.

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Because stories told by contributors to TIP are deeply entangled within and circumscribed around a multitude of competing, potentially conflicting stories, narratives of the body—no matter how detailed—can only do so much to portray one's environ(mental) niche. The limits of storytelling to convey one's lived experiences truthfully are many; and in many instances, storytelling come with its own dangers and pitfalls as well. As in Faith Rhyne's case, the narratives of those with diverse mental states may be reappropriated as "proof" for a diagnosis of mental illness or personality disorder. By the very nature of their authors' diagnoses, such self-representations are often viewed as inherently suspect, as are their mental states when they write them. Nevertheless, because ethnographic study concerns itself not only with the "facts" as they unfold but also people's perceptions of the "facts," I consider first-person accounts of madness and of mutual support as psychiatric resistance are taken as valid in and of themselves. What is more, I find them essential to describing how those in TIP come to understand mental suffering for themselves.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note there has been much debate surrounding the "truthfulness" of narratives in their frequent project to represent past embodied experiences and evoke a unified, more cohesive identity through the articulation of suffering. Describing recent scholarly interpretation and criticism of autobiographical works, Smith and Watson state,

> Critics shifted from the concept of a universal "self"—achieving self-discovery, self-creation, and self-knowledge—to a new concept of the "subject" driven by self-estrangement and self-fragmentation; and they explored the problematic relationship of the subject to language. As a result, the project of self-representation could no longer be read as providing direct access to the truth of the self. Truthfulness becomes a more complex phenomenon of narrators struggling to shape an "identity" out of an amorphous subjectivity.[109]

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[109] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 201.

Attempts to find selfhood as a singular identity through writing are tempered, at least within scholarly analysis, by the inability of language to fully symbolize the breadth and complexity of the "self-ing" project and by the many fragmented performances of selfhood that can only ever be partially accessed by the autobiographer herself. To see self-representational writing as Truth would be to fall into a problematic reification of egotistic, telos-driven conceptions of selfhood as something that can be achieved through the meticulous scripting of one's life. Rather, in acknowledging the partiality of self-presentation, we can see points of connections and flow within the self-ing process and humbly recognize the self as caught up within ecological movements far greater than any singular perspective could convey.

Similarly, describing the limits of autobiographical narratives, Angela Woods warns against the danger of promoting them as "*the* mode of human self-expression," which she says, "in turn promotes a specific model of the self—as an agentic, authentic, autonomous storyteller; as someone with unique insight into an essentially private and emotionally rich inner world; as someone who possesses a drive for storytelling, and whose stories reflect and (re)affirm a sense of enduring individual identity."[110] Despite the ways that narratives have often framed illness as a heroic journey and the ways that this framing can lead to neoliberal depictions of autonomous selfhood, Woods believes there is great potential within the diversity of narratives for careful analysis and greater acceptance of the partial, fragmented narratives that bodies tell about themselves.[111]

While attention to environ(mental) niches is crucial to understanding the emotional ecologies of those who experience mental suffering, I do not mean to imply that one's affective engagement in the world is the *only* means through which social issues can be understood or discussed, nor should it be the only method used for

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[110] Angela Woods, "The Limits of Narrative: Provocations for the Medical Humanities," *Medical Humanities* 37, no. 2 (December 2011): 75.

[111] Ibid., 76-77.

describing TIP's dynamism over the years.[112] Under such a lens, a person's self-expression and phenomenological interpretation of her world may lend itself to reifying an egotistic—not ecological—notion of selfhood, and perpetuating oneself as a neoliberal subject separate(d) from others. Therefore, we must be cautious in holding too narrow of a focus on individual feelings and perceptions about one's madness in relation to others.

In overly simplistic renderings of identity politics, such singular perception—even though it may influenced by structural forces—is taken all-too-often as a good or end in itself. After all, the game of identity politics is neoliberal in itself; and in the desire to capture or market the "essence" of a person or community, the danger of intrumentalizing that which makes it unique—even sacred—looms large. And while I triangulated my data from individual interviews, blogs, personal correspondence, and other autobiographic texts with material drawn from other data sets[113] acquired throughout the research project, I do not assume I am "speaking for" the community or that the dissertation is representative in the sense of being "accurate" or "inaccurate." Rather, this work points towards an attention to forces and flows—not as something to be named and captured— but to be reworked and retold in better ways.

## Grounded Theory and Community-Based Participatory Research

My initial perception of TIP's organizational structure significantly informed my initial methods for less hierarchical modes of studying its local and non-geographically bound iterations. Acknowledging their historic aspirations towards collective leadership,

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[112] The Icarus Project—in perhaps overly emphasizing individual narratives—has done so at the cost of being less politically engaged in within public discourse and policy development. In their attention to cultivating nuance within one's personal relationship with psychiatry (and other forms of professional interventions for mental suffering), they have found it difficult as an organization to take a united stance on issues beyond a general emphasis on self-determination and reflexivity within the practice of mental health regimens.

[113] Other data sets include fieldnotes from meetings and other events, focus groups, informal conversations, group correspondence, and other interpersonal encounters.

I attempted to mimic constructivist, communal approaches to shared objectives in the research produced and structured this study to reflect the community-based approach that TIP and the ARMHC sought to achieve in their own practices.[114] Feminist and other post-structuralist epistemologies informed my ethnographic practices—including grounded theory, which promotes an inductive approach to understanding the perspectives of those who have diverse mental states.[115]

Grounded theory allowed research themes to emerge over time through a number of methods including observing group dynamics, face-to-face conversations with research participants, lurking online, and other activities as the opportunity presented itself. Throughout data collection, I coded, analyzed, and compared my findings in reference to theoretical frameworks.[116] Using this approach, my initial research topic changed over time, as themes surfaced from my original observations and preliminary inquiries into TIP and its various iterations, and such comparisons have given me greater insight into the emotional ecologies of peer support and the interpersonal dynamics of caring for those with madness.[117]

Community-based participatory research also allowed themes to become apparent over time. Drawing from numerous scholars' definitions of this method, Nina Wallerstein and Bonnie Duran define CBPR as,

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[114] Bradley Lewis, *Moving Beyond Prozac*,143-152.

[115] See Yvonna S. Lincoln & Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 70-91 and Eugenia Eng, Karen Strazza Moore, Scott D. Rhodes, Derek M. Griffith, Leo L. Allison, Kate Shirah, and Elvira M. Mebane, "Insider and Outsiders Assess Who is 'The Community': Participant Observation, Key Informant Interview, Focus Group Interview, and Community Forum," *Methods in Community-based Participatory Research for Health*, ed. Barbara A. Israel, et al. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 81-82.

[116] See Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods," in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry, 2nd ed*, ed. Normank Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 249-291.

[117] Ibid., 251.

In a collaboration, shared principles result in a negotiation of information and capacities in mutual directions: researchers transferring tools for community members to use to analyze conditions and make informed decisions on actions to improve their lives, and community members transferring their expert content and meaning to researchers in the pursuit of mutual knowledge and application of that knowledge to their communities.[118]

Community-based participatory research draws from the ideas of social justice and democratic processes in its attempts to negotiate a non-hierarchical space for shared knowledge to emerge; and through extensive dialogue between researchers and participants, it creates a more equitable exchange of information built on mutual respect and trust.[119]

The difficulties with such methodologies came when research participants did not necessarily identify with the mad community I perceived as being there.[120] Because of this and due to the transience of many who stumble across TIP, I have decided to use the words "attendee," "contributor," or "friend" more frequently than "member" to describe those who participate in the group for whatever length of time or capacity they choose to engage. Likewise, another challenge I faced was of perpetuating the dichotomy between "individual" and "community" and enframing them both within technical renderings. To counter this reification, listening—through both analog and technologically-mediated

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[118] Nina Wallerstein and Bonnie Duran, "The Theoretical, Historical, and Practice Roots of CBPR," in *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health: From Process to Outcomes*, ed. Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 27.

[119] Throughout the course of this project, I did my best not to "use" or "apply" such research methods in the technical sense—for in so doing I would have fallen into a similar trap of technology as outlined the introduction to this dissertation. Rather, I attempted to engage with epistemologies in dialogue within the situations and people I encountered without a specific end product in mind. This non-technical use of method has resonance with what I thought made TIP a noteworthy endeavor.

[120] Eugenia Eng et al., "Insiders and Outsiders Assess," 96.

approaches—helped me gain a more affective, immediate, and embodied sense for the ways they interpreted the ecologies which constitute their lives.

Additionally, the varied bases of knowledge and experiences of researcher and research participants made it difficult to bridge gaps in understanding (theoretical, historical, cultural, etc.) to further collaborative ends.[121] Sometimes, I felt like it was assumed that I function as a person conducting marketing or public relations for TIP, while—in other instances—the national staff and some potential research participants were confused, uninformed, or distrustful of my potentially critical position towards them or the organization.

The nature of how I—as a graduate student researcher—asked to insert myself within TIP's spheres makes it difficult to claim that this research project was truly community-based: I was not invited by the community to facilitate a research project that they envisioned themselves before the onset of this study. Furthermore, because I had some goals for a completed project in mind (such as writing chapters for the dissertation, blogging about my experiences, or making photograph series) at the onset of the study, the terms for what was possible in the project's scope were rather narrow even before I began to solicit advice from participants about how this work could be shared (See Figure 15).[122] Moreover, my deadlines for accomplishing particular goals were rather fixed, and while I did my best to make allowance for "bad days" or times they were feeling withdrawn or socially anxious, I was not always able to adapt the study to the timeframe that felt most approachable to everyone. Still, I choose community-based participatory

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[121] Chris McQuiston, Emilio A Parrado, Julio Cesar Olmos-Muniz, and Alejandro M. Bustillo Martinez, "Community-Based Participatory Research and Ethnography: The Perfect Union," *Methods in Community-based Participatory Research for Health*, ed. Barbara A. Israel, et al. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 224-226.

[122] See Nina Wallerstein, Bonnie Duran, Meredith Minkler, and Kevin Foley, "Developing and Maintaining Partnerships with Communities," *Methods in Community-based Participatory Research for Health*, 2nd ed, ed. Barbara A. Israel, Eugenia Eng, Amy J. Schulz, and Edith A. Parker. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 43-68.

research as a method because of its alignment with TIP's attitudes to inclusivity and sharing power in decision-making and group-organizing processes.

To that end, I presented myself as a participant-observer who was willing to engage earnestly in the culture's own terms. In both analog and digital spheres, I divulged some of my own lived experiences with diverse mental states and my family's history of psychiatric diagnoses as well.[123] In Asheville, I shared during group check-ins, became emotionally engaged with my research participants individually, provided emotional support when requested, and volunteered my time and skills. During the several weeks I spent on the Icarus forums, I posted about my emotional and mental states on the message board's Daily Roll Call and used the group's colloquialisms in my writing. At times, I felt as though I was performing "madness" at some level or becoming overly sensitive to whatever negative feelings I experienced throughout the day in an attempt to "fit in," even though I held no illusions that my everyday mental struggles could be equated to the intensity of mental suffering that they frequently experience. Nevertheless, as I tried to become more open and reflexive about my own feelings, I found that my research participants became less guarded around me as well, and began to see me in more *emic*—or insider—terms; and as I neared the end of my field in Asheville and Brooklyn, I was grateful for the sense of familiarity, friendship, and mutual support I, too, felt amongst those who contributed to this study.

SELECTING FIELD SITES AND DETERMINING DATA SOURCES

Within the practice of briocolage, my journeys across analog and digital spaces led me to places I could not have predicted I would traverse as I was writing my initial proposal for this project. Nevertheless, as I learned more about TIP, it became quickly apparent that Asheville was a natural choice to begin fieldwork. When I made initial

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[123] Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T. L. Taylor, *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 69-72.

contact with co-founder Sascha DuBrul about the possibility of conducting an ethnography with TIP, he told me that the New York City Icarus group—where I had initially planned to move—did not, as of January 2014, have regular meetings.[124] Instead, he recommended that I talk to Faith Rhyne in Asheville, where the local group has had a presence within the community for several years. Because Rhyne was also the national local group support coordinator, I would be able to meet with her regularly and connect with other Icarus local group facilitators from the bi-monthly organizing calls she held. Secondly, because Rhyne had a long-term presence on the online forums (as her initial point of contact with TIP), she was able to make introductions to key individuals and serve as a gatekeeper of sorts into the greater community.[125]

While I was living in Asheville (from July 2014 through the end of January 2015), I also learned about some of TIP's many local chapters and material culture[126]— including its digital iterations on online forums, Facebook groups, listserves, Google Groups, e-mail archives, organizing notes on Riseup and Wikispaces, conference calls, even a now-defunct MySpace page. Sorting through such digital archives and attempting to spend some time on all formats was a daunting task—one that is ripe for further

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[124] In the fall of 2014, DuBrul helped to revive the NYC Icarus chapter, which—as of March 2015—continues to hold weekly meetings and monthly events. The chapter does not currently operate as a support group, rather, it is still a relatively closed activist group interested in developing its internal organizational process and a mission statement. Providing support may be a goal of some organizing members, but many others are interested in website development, theater workshops, and policy work.

[125] It is important to note that CPBR often features prominent leaders within the community, some of whom may steer the proposed research project towards a certain trajectory. For this reason, bricolage, paired with listening to a multiplicity of voices, lends itself to a more open and honest approach to research, one that tries to avoid the notion that any one person—no matter how forceful—can "represent" the community in its entirety.

[126] Material culture includes written documents, artifacts, digital traces (websites, digital photographs, online videos), audio and film documents, and other records that, in some way, persist "physically and thus can be separated across space and time from its author, producer, or user." See Ian Holder, "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture," in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials,* 2nd ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008): 155-175.

research. As in common in bricolage approaches, my methods for incorporating data from such sites evolved organically as I adapted my analysis to the data at hand and integrated observations from digital spaces into arguments about the instability of such media.

In treating digital spaces as field sites in themselves, I learned that digital archives, while often containing dates and a wealth of other key information about TIP's history, are just as cumbersome and arduous as analog archives in combing to find relevant information.[127] Data loss on public archives and the instability of those and other digital spaces made it difficult to for me to even trust the information I found on those spaces as accurate.[128] And the nature of the medium and the limitations of the website designers often led to poor accessibility and maintenance of digital content.[129]

During March 2015, my month-long stay there gave me a starting point to compare two vastly different local Icarus groups and spend some time with Sascha DuBrul, Jonah Bossewitch, and Bradley Lewis—all of whom had played key roles in TIP's development. While there, I attended a number of Icarus-related events and became

[127] At the end of my time in New York City, I received access to a substantial archive of e-mails concerning web development and another national organizing initiatives. Although I have not been able to sort through the totality of this huge influx of information, I have used some of the data to supplement some sections on the technical aspects of the organization's development.

[128] Such as data lost on MySpace, MayFirst listservs, blogs on The Icarus Project website, contact databases, local group spheres, etc.

[129] For example, a date when an article was posted, along with who published the article, on the Icarus website could mean the date it was written and the author; it could mean the date it was uploaded and who uploaded it; or it could mean the date the document was revised and re-posted. Nevertheless, over the course of several months, I scoured through old posts on the forum and looked through a recently updated version of the Icarus website that had some policies listed—as well quite a few more broken links to past archives on older versions of the website. On the Icarus Facebook group with high activity from its many members, the constant posts on the page made it impossible for me to use that site for anything more than browsing the Facebook page and taking screenshots of conversations I found relevant. Even my few attempts to crowd-source some Icarus history on the forums and the Facebook group, were often thwarted by the continual posts made by others in crisis, those with more recognition in the organization, or by those with more intriguing questions to ask the group than my admittedly tedious questions.

acquainted with people from the local NYC Icarus group; and through informal conversations, I became more versed in current challenges in organizing at local and national levels (See Figures 26 and 27). I did not conduct fieldwork in the traditional sense of conducting interviews and focus groups; rather, my aim was to get a better sense for key ARMHC attendees' roles, to mitigate the effects of data loss by fact-checking my portrayal of the history of national organization, solicit comments and suggestions for revision, learn more about how another radically different local Icarus chapter operates, and negotiate my relationship with the national organization.[130]

## Collaborations in Asheville

In January 2014, I began exchanging e-mails and Skyping with Faith Rhyne in preparation for creating a dissertation proposal and gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the research study at The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB). When I first inquired about the possibility of spending several months in Asheville doing an ethnography, Rhyne had described the group as feeling adrift in the several months following an attendee's suicide and one of the coldest, longest winters on record. She suggested that conducting an ethnography of the ARMHC as it currently operated might be a "fairly dull and non-representative endeavor" and recommended that I reach out to other groups during my fieldwork as well.[131] Not knowing whether there would be a mad community for me to study when I arrived in Asheville, I planned to expand the study to include a survey of other local groups as a part of the project and observation from TIP's digital spheres.

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[130] I was very grateful for the opportunity to process some of my thoughts about particular occurrences from my time in Asheville with those who had gone through similar experiences and listen to a range of attitudes towards mutual aid practices and community organizing practices.

[131] Faith Rhyne, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2014.

After my dissertation proposal had been approved, I visited Asheville in late March 2014 to get a better sense of the city, spend some time informally with potential research participants, and garner support from the group to conduct a study. On an unseasonably blustery, snowy Tuesday, I arrived at Eagle Street Coffee in downtown Asheville to attend the ARMHC weekly support meeting.[132] The mood of the group was very quiet and low energy that day, and I talked briefly about the research project and my personal interest in studying madness before giving the floor to the regular group proceedings.[133]

The next few months in Texas, I spent preparing documents for the study's approval, teaching classes, and making arrangements to move to Asheville. DuBrul and Rhyne wrote letters of support for my ethnographic fieldwork and for online outreach to local chapter organizers, users on TIP's Facebook group(s), and their online forum. After

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[132] Later, in scrolling through discussion on the ARMHC mailing list, I read through the Google Group thread in which they discussed my presence in the group during this trip and had agreed that I could participate within the group, given the pre-established parameters outlined in the proposal.

[133] This one was one of the first times I had spent with a group of those who had mental illness diagnoses. Other than a couple times I had visited loved ones on psychiatric wards and a handful of friends on anti-depressants or ADHD medication, I had not had much direct experience with those who openly talk about their mental struggles. Out of the six attendees, only a couple of them asked questions about the project, one person wondered about the group's policy towards researchers (which, she claimed, historically did not allow them to participate or observe meetings). Another member Russell, who would become one of my good friends, volunteered to meet with me the next day to share his experiences with the mental health care system. Now, looking back and remembering the many people who have come to such meetings for their first time and recognizing that face which silently questioned if they were "crazy" enough to participate in the group, I have to wonder how I acted in my first encounter with the group. I was nervous about how I would be received and a little skeptical myself if this group would be willing to work with me and able to provide the kind of data I was hoping to find.

a full committee review of the research protocol, UTMB's IRB granted approval of the research proposal on June 23, 2014.

## DATA COLLECTION

Throughout the course of my fieldwork in Asheville, the methods for this study remained flexible, to better accommodate the varying needs or preferences of the ARMHC.[134] By advertising the study at these meetings, through word-of-mouth, snowball sampling, and by spending time with group attendees outside of the Tuesday meetings, I gained a broader sense for what kind of data collection might be possible to achieve within the group.[135] During my time in the field, I conducted a recorded semi-structured interviews with local research participants in August and September; and in November and December, I asked them to participant in an exit interview, which was conducted in person or via e-mail.[136] In May 2015, I returned to Asheville to attend two of their Tuesday meetings (which had ceased to include check-ins and discussion) and to confirm with participants that the data presented was representative of their lived experiences and that they felt comfortable with using either their real names or pseudonyms within the dissertation.

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[134] I initially planned to spend six months establishing relationships within the community, collecting data, and soliciting feedback from participants. Following this period of data collection, I intended on living in the city for another two months to write up chapters and solicit feedback from research participants. Although I left a month earlier than planned at the end of January 2014, I had completed my objectives for data collection; and my trip back to the community in May 2015 allowed me sufficient time to show them some of my findings and solicit their feedback of my representation of them.

[135] During Collective group meetings in Asheville, when newcomers to the group arrived, I would introduce myself at check-ins as first as a Ph.D. student doing research for my dissertation, then as a student researcher, and towards the end of my stay in Asheville, as a student working with the Collective. I felt like that such word choice was more accessible and open-ended and invited further conversation should there be interest.

[136] After completing formal interviews, I transcribed relevant sections from the recording and offered a copy of the transcript to those who expressed interest in having a copy of what they said to me.

Monthly potluck brunches also offered a space for further conversation about the research project. In August, I gave a presentation of Chapter 3, which I had finished during my first month of fieldwork, updated them on the research's progress, indicated my goals for the upcoming months, and offered them ways to contribute to the project. From September through December, we would share a meal together; then I would facilitate a recorded focus group discussion on pre-selected topics.[137] Our topics for discussion were as follows: attitudes about traditional psychiatric labels and alternative phrases used in the radical mad community; reasons for contributing to individual blogs, TIP forums, and/or Facebook groups; challenges accessing mental health resources in Buncombe County; and perspectives on the ARMHC's sustainability.

Additionally, I took fieldnotes on my interactions with the ARMHC, especially during their Tuesday meetings. Participants became accustomed to my writing in a small notebook throughout meetings, in which I also shared how I was feeling that week and contributed to group discussions. Conversations on the Google Group and the local Facebook group also served to inform my understanding of the community's process and provided a digital archive from which to draw when I wrote sections of Chapter 5 on the local ARMHC's history. I read through all my interviews and fieldnotes multiple times for coding and analysis and talked with my friends and research participants about noteworthy themes. This dialogical approach to gather feedback helped to crystalize my findings and co-create portrayals of the group in a way that they feel is adequately representative of how they see themselves in relation to others.[138] (Such a visual and

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[137] After each focus group, I transcribed the recording and reviewed its contents for themes to consider while conducting individual interviews. What is more, focus group sessions gave participants an opportunity to see their peers contribute to this project and learn more about the scope and breadth of my research.

[138] See Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3st ed., edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 959-978.

dialectical exchange takes what anthropologist Jay Ruby calls a reflexive stance to approach mutual understanding.[139])

## SHARED KNOWLEDGE AND MUTUAL EXCHANGE

My attempts at sharing knowledge and creating a sense of mutual exchange were met with some success, though not in the ways I first anticipated. It took several months for me to feel a bit more secure in my position as a participant observer, and even longer to feel like I had a good grasp of the group dynamics. In the meantime, I learned how to work with those who had great sensitivities to the world around them. I quickly found that I needed to take initiative to set up meetings or interviews, yet to not take it too personally when meetings had to be rescheduled (due to a research participant's lack of energy, emotional state, transportation issues, employment schedule, housing issues, weather, and other variables that contributed to their mentality that day). I also began to realize my own, "sanist" expectations for how I thought people should act and behave; and I tried to practice patience, knowing that my priorities, initiatives, and agendas were not those of the ARMHC's just yet and that my timeframe for accomplishing certain benchmarks should not be imposed too strictly.[140]

In an e-mail to ARMHC sent out in June 2014, I offered to post updates on a blog about the progression of my dissertation, post video vignettes showcasing regular attendees, create monthly lectures or roundtable discussions about issues relating to the history of psychiatry, or work with them on their ongoing projects.[141] While all of these

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[139] Jay Ruby, "Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film (1)," *Semiotica* 30 no. 1/2 (1980), 153-179.

[140] And even while I did agree to quite a few last minute plans to meet up or give someone a ride, I also learned the value of setting my own boundaries and saying "no" to tasks that I felt were unreasonable impositions on my time and energy.

[141] I also generated content for the group's Wordpress website, helped to advertise upcoming events, and strengthened connections between the group and other local organizations on and offline. Creating such multi-media mirrored the multi-mediated nature

activities did happen in some capacity, more often than not, I found that research participants were not particularly interested in the research project itself. My sense was that many of them were too caught up within their varied mental and emotion emotional states to devote their limited capacity towards an endeavor to which they were not emotionally or intellectually committed. (Yet perhaps their lack of interest is a research finding in itself: The failure to be heard, the failure to be listened to, and the failure to listen are all enmeshed within the problems of technologizing communities and inextricably bound to neoliberal calls for transactional relationships—exchanges which are goal-oriented, timely, and contractual.) I soon reached the conclusion that many of my research participants attended the events I hosted to support me in my scholarly efforts and to socialize with their friends or peers who were also involved in the study.

Over time, my place became a hub for bring people from the ARMHC together. There I hosted an art night, quiet working sessions, conducted interviews, served dinners, made photographic portraits of ARMHC attendees, held a Thanksgiving potluck celebration, planned a Christmas potluck at Kairos West Community Center, and met my sister and her husband when they came to visit (See Figures 18 and 19). I quickly found that offering to meet research participants over at their houses was often more stressful on them than inviting them to my place.[142] However, hosting such events also became a community-building experience in itself, and as my guests came to know each other in these settings, they became more familiar with each other as well. At times, I felt setting up such meetings was rather self-serving on my part, even while I recognized that I was changing the group I aimed to study in reifying their sense of community and even

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of information to which members of local Collective and The Icarus Project at large respond and produce themselves.

[142] That way, they could leave at anytime and not worry about offering any snacks or beverages or worrying about the cleanliness of their place.

providing what could be seen as a therapeutic outlet for participants to socialize through my manner of data collection.[143]

Returning to Asheville in May 2015 allowed me to renegotiate some of my relationships with those in the ARMHC and those who had decided to leave the group. A couple research participants talked with me about their feelings of sadness, even abandonment, when I moved back to Texas during the winter; and in conversing with them, I acknowledged the ways that the research project both strengthened our friendship, while also it also punctuated our roles as researcher and those researched. There were a few difficult moments when research participants felt that I had instrumentalized aspects of our friendship in writing about what they assumed was outside the scope of the research project. I apologized for overstepping such boundaries, explained why I thought that material was of relevant to the research, and deleted or revised sections that made them feel uneasy. I also talked about recognizing my privilege in being able to leave the community in juxtaposition to the lack of mobility, financial stability, and social connections necessary for many those in Asheville to restart their lives elsewhere. Before I left once more, I reassured friends there that I would be back to visit in the coming months and years; and their generous gifts of lodging and meals on my trip back made me feel as though they also recognized that my relationship with them was more than a solely academic undertaking, but one of mutual hospitality and friendship.

**IMAGE PRODUCTION AS COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE**

As I seek to demonstrate, ethnographers engaged in producing media themselves must analyze dimensions of digital technology and social media from the standpoint of

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[143] In living around those who often struggled financially, I recognized that my graduate student stipend provided much more security and small luxuries than the average income of most Collective members and that offering a meal alongside research-related activities was enough incentive for many to participate.

working directly with a particular medium, recognizing its limits firsthand, and understanding what is absent within its production. Media production *as* scholarship enabled me to foster collaborative practices with participants, share information in an easily accessible medium, and produce novel visual scholarship.[144] Still, in planning this research project, I did not anticipate how difficult it would be to use my camera to document the group's activities and create a film project in conjunction with the written portion of my dissertation, and my goals for making videos and photographs shifted significantly as I realized more of the barriers to working with mad communities. While I was occasionally invited to take photographs at public events, such as the dinner I attended during my exploratory trip to Asheville, the regular support group meetings did not seem appropriate to disrupt with the camera's presence, which would have created a sense of further unease. Like almost everyone I have met, most people are shy or self-conscious around the camera (myself included), and with additional sensitivities towards how others' perceptions and worries about my role as a researcher, I felt that ARMHC attendees would see my camera as an unnecessary interruption to what almost seemed like a sacred space for them to decompress, without as much fear of judgment or scrutiny as they perceive from those without similar mental struggles.

After this realization, I often took research participants' lead in determining when the camera should be used and choosing the topic of the video. Once I had met with

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[144] As Digital Humanities scholar David Berry argues, it is not enough to critique media, but that social researchers should use technology to shape their methodologies as well. Broadly, Digital Humanities seek to study the humanities through the use of digital tools and techniques. From this discipline's inception (arguably since the 1940s), the field has changed significantly from a field that used to be seen as a handmaiden to humanities' scholarship to a scholarly field in and of itself. Within this shift, David Berry describes third-wave digital humanities—as one that "points the way in which digital technology highlights the anomalies generated in a humanities research project and which leads to the questioning of the assumptions implicit in such research, e.g. close reading, canon formation, periodization, liberal humanism, etc." This project can be categorized within such scholarship in that it asks questions about the co-evolution of humans and technology and seeks to answer these questions through the use of technology itself. See David Berry, "The Computational Turn: Thinking about the Digital Humanities," *Culture Machine* (12) 2011, 4.

research participants several times and once we became more familiar with each other, I asked if anyone was interested in participating in a film and photography component of the project. When they volunteered to do a visual project without a specific idea in mind, we would talk about themes that had come up in previous conversations and come up with a topic to discuss on camera together. After shooting, I edited the footage and selected photographs and sent them copies of the finished work for comment and review. I then made the image(s) and shared them with research participants, many of which they posted on other digital spaces.[145]

These opportunities to discuss, shoot, edit, and co-create media with research participants not only allowed me to discover what dimensions of participants' lived experiences were most important for them to tell publically, but also allowed for a more collaborative portrayal of their narratives in manner that was somewhat distanced from the traditional mediation of a scholar's academic prose.[146] Due to this process, most of the short video projects produced during fieldwork served a rather self-promotion end for research participants, with the secondary end of being ethnographically interesting for the sake of learning how people presently choose to talk about their stories. Still, working with individuals on these projects was a way to learn about their ways of making plans, setting agendas, discussing their ideas, and collaborating in a medium with which most of them were rather unfamiliar.

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[145] In one instance, a video I made with a research participant made it into the final round of a video competition with the National Disability Institute. He later requested its removal following the competition, a request which the organization honored. See National Disabilities Institute, "My American Dream: Voices of Americans with Disabilities Video Contest," accessed April 17, 2015. http://dream.realeconomicimpact.org.

[146] This is not to say that research participants' self-representation was somehow more "authentic" or true to the source than if I solely had written about their experiences. Rather, digital images mediated descriptions of diverse mental states in a different manner than academic writing could articulate and were created with a broader, general audience in mind.

With encouragement from friends in the ARMHC, I also began using the camera in a similar way to post video updates about my research project and use my image on screen as a way to recruit Icarus participants across the country to participate in the research project. In fact, even more before I began fieldwork, I posted a short introductory video about the proposed research project and solicited feedback from those interested in learning more about the dissertation topic and co-creating the study together. In the weeks that followed, Rhyne shared the video across many Icarus platforms as a way of announcing my intentions and contextualizing later calls for research participate later on.[147] In this manner, filming myself and posting links to short videos about the research project became a way for those in the ARMHC to get more accustomed to the idea of being on camera themselves.[148]

As a whole, these videos and photos did serve as an entree into the ARMHC and other local community-oriented organizations and provided an avenue for me to contribute media production services for causes that community attendees felt need attention. In addition to the promotional videos I created for individuals in the ARMHC, I also produced a series of four short videos for BeLoved House showcasing some of their outreach programs and two videos for Kairos West Community Center on their mission for community space.[149] In addition, I learned more about the social services provided in

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[147] Erica Fletcher, "Proposed Research with The Icarus Project," *YouTube* video, 2:01, May 2, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/g8f9wFfzOFM.

[148] In one instance, a research participant asked to film me talking on camera for a few minutes, before she felt ready to be recorded herself). See Erica Fletcher, "'You are not alone,' Kerry McCullen's reflections on Icarus Project STL," *YouTube* video, 3:43, November 19, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/3tD9XNVk3gk.

[149] BeLoved House, "Celebrating Blue Ridge Pride," YouTube video, 3:03, October 3, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/WiGKx4i35KU; BeLoved House, "BeLoved's Free Farmers' Market at Senior Opportunity Center," *YouTube* video, 1:13, September 24, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/6KWhV_NlDXo; BeLoved House, "Rise Up Studio at BeLoved," *YouTube* video, 3:31, September 24, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/bRBqYR3nqHU; BeLoved House, "Sundays at Be Loved House," *YouTube* video, 3:13, September 24, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/m7HnxeiW-IM; Kairos West, "What is Kairos West Community Center?," *YouTube* video, 0:55, November

the Asheville area and the many challenges to accessing housing, transportation, and
health care that those with few economic resources endure on a daily basis. In this way,
media production helped me befriend leaders of these organizations and furthered ties
between the ARMHC and related groups involved in social service.

## Collaborations with TIP

Although I spent the majority of my time in the field working directly with those
in the ARMHC, I also sought out opportunities to share resources with staff from the
national organization and its membership throughout the project's progress (See Figure
20). To better inform Icarus viewership about this research project and about social
research in general, I collaborated with Faith Rhyne and Timothy Kelly to create a series
of Mad Studies pages on TIP website.[150] These pages—uploaded in July 2014—provided
a general introduction to scholarship with TIP and include sections on best practices for
researchers, current research projects, frequently asked questions for potential research
participants, commonly used terms in social research, a bibliography, and links to other
scholarly resources. In addition, I wrote monthly updates on the research's progress on
my blog and posted links to the update on the forums and national Facebook group.

From September through October 2014, I recruited local group organizers to
participate in a short survey in Google Forms about their use of digital communication,
relationship with the national organization, and challenges to facilitating group
discussions. When she was still serving as the national local group coordinator, Faith
Rhyne helped me advertise this aspect of the study and posted announcement on an e-
mailing list for group facilitators and on the online forums. In the process of recruiting

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21, 2014, accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/5KLkZhaep88; Kairos West, "Radical
Welcome at Kairos West Community Center," *YouTube* video, 2:07, November 21, 2014,
accessed June 7, 2015. https://youtu.be/Gdr9IP3X7-A.

[150] Erica Fletcher, "Mad Studies," *The Icarus Project*, July 7, 2014, accessed June 7,
2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/wiki/mad-studies.

group leaders, I also joined a number of local Icarus Facebook groups to learn if their chapters were still in operation as regular meet-up groups (rather than solely digital spaces). In total, I received responses from about half of the active chapters in the United States, including representation from Greensboro, North Carolina; Portland, Oregon; Oakland, California; St. Louis, Missouri; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (See Chapter 4 for results from this survey).

During the month of February, I devoted much of my time to constructing a working draft of the Chapter 4 on the national organization, so that staff members could review it with me when I arrived. However, my relationship with the staff had become tenuous, and I was unsure about the kind of reception I would have when I moved to Brooklyn. A month before, in January, I had sent Icarus Project staff—along with leaders in the St. Louis Radical Mental Health Collective—an abstract proposing a paper presentation for an upcoming panel discussion for the Society for Psychological Anthropology conference, a paper that discussed the former group's changing relationship to the national organization as a window into larger structural changes in national leadership. Not realizing how poorly the abstract might be received, I naively sent the draft to both parties and asked for their review, comments, and approval.

What followed from both groups was a series of exchanges in which they questioned my intent in writing about this topic. The local group in St. Louis more readily gave me permission to write about their negotiations with the national organization; and because I had talked to several of them previously in a conference call and because I had hosted one of their facilitators in Asheville, we had mutual rapport previously established.[151] However, with the national organization, I received e-mails and a phone call in which my methods in data collection and—more broadly—my ethics as a

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[151] One member of the St. Louis Radical Mental Health Collective, who played a key role in the shift away from the national organization, asked me if I could wait for a while before writing anything further until she had more time to process those events.

researcher were questioned by three out of the four staff members.

The national staff found some aspects of my ideas about the chapter's potential trajectory to be suspect and even detrimental to the organization. In a phone call, the national organizer for TIP told me to halt any further work on this matter until we had created a memorandum of understanding detailing my relationship and timeframe for working with them. Several weeks after sending the staff a draft of a proposed memorandum, I had not heard back from them; and my attempts to set up a meeting with my point of contact also went unanswered. Understandably, both groups seemed concerned with issues of representation and how the research findings may impact their public image and their funding potential, in addition to their concerns about the function and utility of a social researcher in critiquing their hard work. (In May 2015, after I had completed a full draft of the dissertation, I Skyped with a national staff member who assured me that my research findings should be not be conflated with the organization's public relations or marketing and that I was free to make whatever analysis of their work as I saw fit.)

Admittedly, I was discussing sensitive issues in a tense milieu. As discussed further in Chapter 4, the national organization had recently taken a firm, neoliberal stance to enforcing moderation policies on multiple Icarus Facebook groups following some heated discussions, in which certain contributors had recently been banned for racist speech. Such enforcement of polices to create anti-oppressive spaces online, in turn, furthered critiques of a lack of transparency within Icarus leadership, as former staff members questioned the new stance towards moderation and towards more authoritarian approaches to leadership within the national organization's structure. In addition, the changing leadership in the national staff and the abrupt dismissal of a longtime Icarus volunteer with extensive experience in website development—all contributed to the stress of conducting the organization's regular functions.

Throughout February, I did my best to reassure Icarus leadership that my purpose

was not to single out individuals or to air "dirty laundry," but to portray the interactions, dynamics, and forces I observed in the community as accurately as possible from my limited perspective. My goal was not to take "sides" or to portray the national organization or any of its chapters negatively. Rather, my intent was to let them know how I understood their goals to create safe spaces and structure within an organization online and offline. In this way, I continued to write chapter 4 on the history of the organization, describing some of the many spaces TIP has occupied and analyzing tensions within the national staff's new vision for decolonizing TIP.

In that chapter, I refer generally to conversations on the forums and the Facebook group without naming individual contributors to such discussions. When I do quote individuals, I have done so with their explicit permission, except in instances in which they (as staff members) represent the organization or when an Icarus contributor's writing is publically available online or in print. Research participants have also had the opportunity to review the portions of my writing in which I analyze and situate their words and to comment on my interpretation of events. In addition, I sent copies of this chapter to current national Icarus staff as well as a few former staff members for their opinion and comment.

Throughout the writing process, I sought to continue open dialogue and to articulate the tensions, successes, and challenges of forming alternative communities. I apologized for any miscommunication or lack of communication regarding my intent to write a critical organizational history earlier on in the project (as two staff members had been hired following my initial introductions to the national organization over a year before I broached the idea of writing this chapter with the staff). Lastly, I identified myself as a student researcher who came to study TIP, in part, because of its identification with historically marginalized people and its emphasis on the structural forces like racism and sexism that contribute to mental distress and because I, too, am committed to promoting anti-oppressive spaces.

Interestingly enough, soon after I had moved to Brooklyn in March, co-founder Sascha DuBrul resigned from TIP, an occurrence which shifted the dynamic of our working relationship. Because he was not all too concerned about the chapter as a tool to market the organization and because he was no longer receiving an income from the group, I was able to get a better sense for his own critiques of the organization, the failings and successes of his own leadership style, his interest in studying charismatic leaders and the collapse of past social movements, and a sense for his own awareness for how the Left often has destroyed itself from within.[152] A few evenings in March, DuBrul and I walked the streets of Manhattan, as he showed me some of the old squats in the Lower East Side that made up the fond memories of his adolescence hanging out in the punk scene. We passed Stonewall Inn of the historic 1968 riots, a key moment in recent anarchist history; and overlooking the Hudson River, we talked about his longtime friendship with Jacks McNamara, this new phase in his life without TIP, ideas for working with other organizations as a part of his graduate program's internship requirements (See Figure 25). Over my going-away dinner party with other friends from NYC Icarus group, we sat on a wooden floor in DuBrul's house and brainstormed ideas for using film within clinical social work, theatre workshops, documentary projects, and in other Icarus-related endeavors.

Form those conversations and others, my own perspective towards the national organization changed significantly, too. In talking with contributors to the local Icarus group New York City, listening to conversations about tensions and ambiguity surrounding the local group's relationship to "National," watching them strive towards

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152 Before I arrived in Brooklyn, past volunteers for The Icarus Project had warned me previously about not succumbing to his tendencies towards a "revisionist" history of the organization; and while I was initially wary of how DuBrul might influence my rendering of events, I also realized his integral role in the organization and how important his mobilization of vast social networks had been in The Icarus Project's growth. My fears of his influence within my representation of the organization were tempered greatly as we got to know each other, and I came to a greater appreciation of his commitments and priorities.

collaborative practices, and sensing the real frustration members had about the lack of context and grounding for TIP's history, I found a sense of relief that the obstacles the ARMHC were not at all dissimilar to those elsewhere. Similarly, I also found comfort in retelling stories of my time in Asheville with those who understood the profound challenges of peer support and could empathize with my angst about what I could have done to support my friends in ARMHC who are grappling with tough transitions. What is more, after gaining a better sense for the economic realities of the national organization's budget, I came to understand how certain decisions and priorities often lead to a disconnect between their commitments and those of local chapters.

As my formal research came to a close, DuBrul asked me to update the organization's Wikipedia page, which contained spare, inaccurate, and outdated information about the mission and scope. Alongside the distribution of the dissertation (which will be available to download off my blog), we also discussed the dissemination of findings from this dissertation in the form of short videos, blog posts, or a 'zine that summarizes the following chapters. Such ongoing negotiation of what I can contribute to the community creates a sense of reciprocity, furthers communication, establishes a greater trust, and serves to engender mutual respect and shared understanding over time.

## Politics of Representation

Despite my attempts at collaborative practices, this multi-sited ethnography was somewhat of an autonomous project, which lacked much direct oversight on the part of my research participants. I was questioned rather infrequently about my research project by newcomers or even regular contributors to TIP. While ARMHC attendees in Asheville generally knew that I planned to do interviews and focus groups after I arrived, they were satisfied with fairly general explanations of the project. Similarly, the national organization did not request any formal updates; and it was only after I had completed

most of my fieldwork in Asheville and made preparations to spend a month in New York City did the staff begin to take more interest in my work.

As with any ethnography, researchers' personalities, communication styles, methodological approaches, levels of expertise, etc. contribute to very different results; and I imagine that other social researchers in my position could create an infinite number of other gestures towards the evolving roles of technology within TIP and ARMHC's respective organizational histories.[153] Time constraints, my inability to provide a monetary incentive for Icarus national staff and local facilitators in Asheville to work with me, a dearth of emotional or mental energy it would take for Icarus staff and volunteers to look over past e-mails and other digital archives to determine specific dates or key turning points in the organization's formation, and a fear that discussing such matters with a researcher would portray a negative image of the organization—all factor into the creation of a rather impressionistic rendering of their organization histories and current permutations.[154]

In reflecting on the politics of representation and the ethics of writing, I found it difficult to trust wholeheartedly even my own rendering of experiences within mad communities. Speaking to dilemmas of representation within cultural anthropology and researchers' biases, Philippe Bourgois writes,

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[153] Jonah Bossewitch, a doctoral candidate at Columbia's School of Journalism and an Icarus web developer (from 2005-2015), takes a similar approach to analyzing the "discursive fragments" of The Icarus Project's material culture in his forthcoming dissertation chapter. See Jonah Bossewitch, "Dangerous Gifts: Alternative Mental Health Politics and a New Wave of Psychiatric Resistance" (forthcoming PhD dissertation, Columbia University).

[154] In one instance, a potential informant saw my efforts to piece together an organizational history from information I found through archival material online as being a deep violation of ethical research practices. Even though I had presented my initial draft as a beginning point in the history and as a backdrop for a recorded interview with them in which they could further clarify the history, they felt that my retrospective data collection was insensitive, even unethical. Although we were able to find resolution from this incident, we never completed an audio interview together.

> …the methodological logistics of participation-observation requires researchers to be physically present and personally involved. This encourages them to overlook negative dynamics because they need to be empathetically engaged with the people they study and must also have their permission to live with them. This leads to an unconscious self-censorship that shapes the research settings and subjects anthropologists choose to study.[155]

Likewise, I also found it tricky to describe—much less critique—troubling dynamics that further confounded TIP's ability to organize, and I frequently questioned my own motivations for writing about or omitting treacherous topics and their relevance within the current literature.[156] Certain instances in which I felt my research participants were being emotionally manipulated do not feature in my writing, nor do the moments when they spread rumors or maligned each other in private conversations or correspondence with me. Knowing that I would make portions of this dissertation available for comment, critique, and revision with many of my research participants, I felt it necessary to censor some of my research participants' comments, rather than risking the possibility that their words to be sensationalized, provoke unnecessary embarrassment, used as cause for division within TIP, or to create further tension amongst the interpersonal dynamics of research participants who know each other well. What is more, I did not want my portrayal of research participants to lend itself to perpetuating problematic beliefs about

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[155] Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14.

[156] I have also wondered if I have perpetuated a mostly white, male-dominated account of the organization's history, simply in the demographics of my primary informants who choose to participate in this ethnography and spend a significant amount of time working with me. There may be gendered reasons why white women and women of color who have worked on The Icarus Project were otherwise preoccupied or felt less compelled to tell me about their contributions to the movement; and as the organization underwent significant shifts, I later learned that certain staff members felt overextended, overly scrutinized by membership, protective of their emotional energy, and concerned about their representation within this research. Yet the irony remains that in discussing the shift towards more women and people of color in leadership positions, I recognize that many of their voices are largely silent in this study; and in observing how certain stories are told and who are absent from this monograph, I can point to several sites that deserve further scholarly work (See Conclusion).

dramatic interpersonal tensions, gender stereotypes of madness, hypersexuality, even artistic romanticism that have often stigmatized those with mental illness diagnoses.[157]

Admittedly, there were many times in which my goals for collaboration fell short of the mark—either in involving research participants too quickly in the process of writing (and raising alarms about what I thought relevant to explore), or informing them too late about my progress in the research project (and risking a perception of being slighted in the ways I appropriated their words). At times, such missteps, gaps in research, and failures in communication resulted in an uncomfortable resistance and hesitancy towards their contributing to this project. In addition, my own reticence to ask for set meeting times to talk with some of the national staff, meet with certain potential research participants, hazy ideas of what questions I should ask at the onset of this project (as is often the nature of community-based participatory research), the many intricacies of working with a highly sensitive, astute population, and my own fears and insecurities as a young academic—all factored into the communication issues and failures to collaborate with potential research participants.[158]  Often, I felt uncomfortable asking some research participants to read about my understanding of the unsavory realities they experienced or engaged in themselves. And while my commitment to collaboration often overrode my desire to avoid conflict with my research participants, I also recognize that the performance of such transparency was rather illusory itself and that I—as an ethnographer—have taken the privileged position of textual ownership in portraying histories of the starts, stops, pauses, and unravelings that make up TIP.

**Reflections**

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[157] I largely have obscured identifying features when they may cause unnecessary harm to research participants and inquired about how they would like me to refer to them (i.e. their full name, first name, or pseudonym) throughout the writing process.

[158] Ironically, these factors also served to validate my initial inklings about the role of technology in opening up, muddling, and shutting down spaces for further communication.

My impressionistic, ephemeral rendering of the organization's attributes and iterations mirror those of TIP itself, and I offer a limited reading of mad communities' instability as yet another starting point into the precarity and fragility of what it might mean to be mad together. At times, my *schizoanalysis* of TIP's spheres felt schizophrenic itself; and in taking on the method of bricolage, I chose an arbitrary system of coordinates, worked off particular conceptions of bodies and the stories they tell, followed roots systems, and—in so doing—created root systems concurrently. Analyzing cumbersome data sets, navigating my responsibilities as a friend and ethnographer with research participants, reflecting on emerging themes, and rummaging through digital archives seemed like a massive undertaking—one with no moment of clarity or finality. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattarri would affirm that this continual emergence or outpouring of potential research trajectories is what makes aspects of this project a schizoanalytic process.[159] While, under certain deadlines and institutional commitments of my own, I did my best to end "official data collection" at the close of May 2015; my relationship with research participants and intellectual questioning of the internal logics within technologies, madness, and communities will continue far beyond these pages. And in the chapters that follow, I seek to show the connections amongst c/s/x movements, TIP, and local initiatives within their attempts build mad communities and to unearth the in/fertile environment that contribute to their de/formation within particular spaces.

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[159] In the concluding chapter, I note the loss endemic within The Icarus Project, in its digital spaces as well as amongst its contributors who have moved on from the community or committed suicide; and I argue that technique of schizoanalysis does not adequately address this loss.

# Chapter 3: Tales of Madness: A Schizoanalysis of Psychiatric Resistance within Consumer/Survivor/Ex-patient Movements

It's a rule of nature that the ground does not stay bare for very long. Wherever soil has been disturbed there are always seeds that come along which grow into plants with roots and leaves that cover the bare soil, providing homes for all kinds of creatures and enriching the earth over their cycles of life and death. These plants are called pioneer plants because they lay the groundwork for the inevitable successions that follow. Many of the most common pioneer plants are the ones we are trained to see as weeds, plants like the dandelion whose strong taproot extends far below the depleted topsoil to the deep layers of subsoil that hold hidden minerals underground. The dandelion pulls these minerals up and incorporates them into its leaves and flowers; when it dies all the nutrients that were locked underground join the upper layers of soil and make them available to the next generations of plants growing in the soil.

We have learned, in TIP, to see the dandelion—this wild and unpredictable plant that reaches into the fertile darkness of underground places—as a symbol for our work. Many of the ideas from TIP are taken from the cultural and political underground, from important stories and wisdom that are not so easy to find in the topsoil of mainstream culture. Many of our visions for the future emerge from the depths of our own experiences as the mad ones whose roots reach down into the darkness but whose voices open up into the light.

Pioneer plants tend to create thousands of tiny seeds that are lightweight, sometimes with fine hairs that act like parachutes, keeping them afloat in the wind and preventing them from succumbing too quickly to gravity. We see TIP setting seed and releasing messages from hidden worlds that just might travel far and wide and colonize patches of damaged soil all over the planet, slowly transforming old stories into new, laying the groundwork for inevitable changes. In this spirit, the dandelion serves as an organic metaphor for our strategy and our vigilant hope going into the future.

—Sascha Altman DuBrul[160]

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[160] Sascha Altman DuBrul, "The Icarus Project," 270.

Drawing from the work of Icarus Project founder Sascha DuBrul and his poetic description of dandelions, I seek to unearth roots and root systems in order to describe a history of psychiatric resistance. Dandelion roots are particularly powerful metaphors to explore here—their taproots consist of rhizomatic structures that branch out and extend dimensionally to a number of spheres and planes. For this reason, I use Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri's theorization of *rhizomes* and of the practice of *schizoanalysis* as frameworks to examine the historical and philosophical underpinnings of mental health care delivery, to outline feminist critiques of psychiatry, to contextualize stories of psychiatric resistance within c/s/x movements and to situate four narratives within a trajectory of former patients' resistance to the imposition of psychiatry.

Within a schizoanalysis of select narratives, I seek to offer *a* fragmented history of psychiatric resistance, for certainly there have been many other tales told on the same topic.[161] And, as founder Sascha Altman DuBrul writes, it is difficult to create a singular history, when narrative strands of anarchism, anti-psychiatry, permaculture/sustainable ecology, LGBTQ movement, harm reduction, global justice movement, counterculture, and punk rock have all coalesced—as he sees it—to form the "social, political, cultural, and ecological movements that most notably inspired TIP." While I certainly draw from DuBrul's roots and pull from elements of these cultures in my own work, I also seek to offer a history that parallels historic shifts in the epistemolog(ies) of psychiatry and health social movements formed by consumer, survivors, and ex-patients.[162] And in

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[161] See Dale Peterson, *A Mad People's History of Madness* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982); Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Andrew T. Scull, *Madhouses, Mad-doctors, and Madmen: The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

[162] Social histories of psychiatry have done much to expose the ways in which the professionalization of the field often has merged with the state forces to control populations thought to be potentially disruptive to the status quo. Drawing from Foucauldian theories on power and governmentality, social history gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s as a counter to the Whig tradition's progress narrative of "Man's" advancement and sought to change the face of psychiatry's past by examining the stories of those who experienced the

examining tales of madness, particularly those written in the last several decades, I trace

the growth of TIP from its roots, searching for ways to find more nuanced stances

towards biomedical frameworks for treating varied mental states.  I also describe the

environ(mental) niches former patients inhabited during their interactions with

psychiatric intervention and discuss the ways they made meaning of their traumatic

experiences, and strove more humane approaches to stabilizing extreme mental states.

Moreover, I argue that their struggles and stances towards psychiatry have contributed to

TIP to a middle ground between the progress narrative of psychiatry and the anti-

psychiatry movement.

## The Rise of Asylums

In sketching the forces that contributed to the rise of asylums, I will use feminist

critiques of psychiatry to point to the social construction of nosologies and treatments

over time. As cultures define the "normal" against the "pathological," practices for

engaging those who endure mental suffering change as well. And as the shifts in such

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power of the state and medicine firsthand. Characterizing this movement, Nancy Tomes
writes, "Social history was often described as 'history from the bottom up' because it
assumed that groups formerly deemed politically and intellectually insignificant, such as
slaves, workers, and housewives, where in fact profoundly interesting and influential
historical actors."
See Nancy Tomes, "Feminist History of Psychiatry," *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*,
ed. Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 356.
    Feminist histories (like those of historian Elaine Showalter and psychotherapist
Phyllis Chesler) follow in the tradition of social approaches to history. Spurred by the
women's liberation movement, feminist scholars sought to correct the Whig tradition of
focusing solely on the "Greats" (the founding fathers of the psychiatry). Instead, feminist
historians turned their attention to the silences within past histories—those whose stories
cannot be told through key dates or pivotal moment in history—and brought to light the ways
that women have been largely excluded from historical attention. Moreover, in offering
revisions to the way history is often told, these historians emphasize that gender biases and
sexism can be stressors to women's mental states and point out the important roles women
played in countering the field of psychiatry. See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady:
Women, Madness, and English Culture: 1830-1980* (London, UK: Virago, 1988) and Phyllis
Chesler, *Women and Madness*.

norms during the Jeffersonian Age indicate, psychiatry practiced during that time reveals an increasingly capitalistic society in which people were valued by their ability to produce and in which social ties diminished significantly.

In colonial America, social historian David Rothman writes that the responsibility towards those unable to care for themselves fell upon local communities as a part of their religious and social duty; and in keeping with such belief, villagers from small colonial towns often pooled money and provided food and shelter for the poor, vagabonds, orphaned, and those deemed mad or otherwise unfit for traditional participation in the polis.[163] In larger cities, almshouses and workhouses became centers to support those in need or for strangers unable to find lodging and work; and in exchange for labor, people were able to live with their families in these facilities and come and go at their leisure.[164] Flexibility for handling people in a case-by-case basis was necessary during a time when small communities held great power in determining the fate of their most vulnerable members.

Historians traditionally associated the rise of insane asylums with the professionalization of medicine and a greater knowledge base for the etiology of mental illness.[165] However, Rothman's critical intervention to this progress narrative of science charts out other forces that contributed significantly to their spread. Namely, the Industrial Revolution brought with it a growing need for alternative labor markets, such as penitentiaries, orphan asylums, reformatories, and other totalizing institutions as growing state governments attempted to establish greater order and social control.[166]

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[163] David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Company, 1971), 1-29.

[164] Ibid., 30-31.

[165] Albert Deutsch, *The Mentally Ill in America: A History of Their Care and Treatment from Colonial Times* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1946) 440-462; Gregory Zilboorg and George W. Henry, *A History of Medical Psychology* (New York City, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1941), 451-454.

[166] David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum,* 57-59.

The professionalization of psychiatry was thus deeply entrenched within the ethos of the Industrial Revolution, and psychiatry's impetus to capitalize on those deemed pathological mandated those in asylums and prison to enter labor markets within those institutions. Social theorist Michel Foucault writes, "In the asylum, work is deprived of any productive value; it is imposed only as a moral rule; a limitation of liberty, a submission to order, an engagement of responsibility, with the single aim of disalienating the mind lost in the excess of a liberty which physical constraint limits only in appearance."[167] The enforcement of labor in the asylum thus served as a social control to instill the "proper" work ethic in patients, curb the slothfulness thought to have caused their madness, and shape liberal citizens who could embody the rationality and enlightenment of the Industrial Age.

To this end, elements of social control can also be seen within the widespread fear of degeneration during the 1800s and early 1900s. As the Industrial Revolution brought on a swell of urbanization, immigration, and social unrest, social ties became more fragmented, fear of contagion grew, and citizens in the Western world began to fear the degeneration of their society. To curb the perceived threat that individuals and whole civilizations could become corrupted by the overindulgence in vice and breeding with those with inferior dispositions, Progressive liberals used scientific discourses of evolution and inheritance to justify a number of their policies to mitigate the spread of degeneration.

As Michel Foucault writes in *Madness and Civilization*, bodies became increasingly biologized and medicalized in the nineteenth century and onwards. He explains the historical intersection of asylums' widespread emergence, social ostracization of the mad, and the internalization of shame that made it possible for people to be seen as mentally pathological,

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[167] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization,* 57.

It must not be forgotten that "objective," or "positive," or "scientific" psychology founds its historical origin and its basis in pathological experience. It was an analysis of duplications that made possible a psychology of the personality; an analysis of compulsions and of the unconscious that provided the basis for a psychology of consciousness; an analysis of deficits that led to a psychology of intelligence. In other words, man became a "psychologizable species" only when his relation to madness made a psychology possible, that is to say, when his relation to madness was defined by the external dimension of exclusion and punishment and by the internal dimension of moral assignation and guilt. In situating madness in relation to these two fundamental axes, early-nineteenth-century man made it possible to grasp madness and thus to initiate a general psychology.[168]

Man thus came to seem himself as an object of knowledge and a potential source of pathology, moral corruption, and degeneration. He internalized governance and managed himself through adherence to rules for regulating the mind. Similarly, the rules for managing populations as aggregations of individuals who are potentially pathological, and noncompliant, were seen as technological problems of turning the clinical gaze upon oneself and others alike. To end this dynamic of self-policing is to give up on the rules for regulating the mind, to—as Chapter 2 indicates—to uncivilize mental states, and to give up the myth that the place of intervention is the individual's mind in isolation.

Within this confluence of forces, great anxiety over the potential deterioration of "modern" society prevailed. In *Faces of Degeneration*, social historian Daniel Pick explains, "Degeneration involved at once a scenario of racial decline (potentially implicating everyone in society) and an explanation of 'otherness,' securing the identity of, variously, the scientist, (white) man, bourgeoisie against superstition, fiction, darkness, femininity, the masses, effete aristocracy."[169] Moreover, under scientific paradigms of understanding the body, the belief that brains could degenerate to madness

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168 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization,* 122-123.

169 Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, 1848-1918*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 230.

through overindulgence and excessive vice also spread during this time, so that all in society had to maintain vigilance to prevent this grim possibility.[170] Detailing this fear, Pick writes, "Degeneration slides over from a description of disease or degradation as such, to become a kind of self-reproducing pathological process—a casual agent in the blood, the body and the race—which engendered a cycle of historical and social decline perhaps finally beyond social determinism."[171] Hence, the dread of evolutionary decay took on a moralizing tone and furthered actions to squelch its proliferation.

In addition, anxieties surrounding modern life, beliefs that cures could come with early intervention and institutionalization, and the desire to create a disciplined society fomented the perceived need to silo the mentally ill and contributed to the rise of the asylum. Describing the power of this institution in the social imaginary, Rothman states,

> The asylum was to fulfill a dual purpose for its innovators. It would rehabilitate inmates and then, by virtue of its success, set an example of right action of the larger society. There was a utopian flavor to this first venture, one that looked to reform the deviant and dependent and to serve as a model for others. The well-ordered asylum would exemplify the proper principles of social organization and thus insure the safety of the republic and promote its glory.[172]

Although its establishment did little to prevent mental suffering, the promise to "reform the deviant" provided powerful impetus to support their construction and implementation during the Jacksonian Era (1820-1845).

In the spirit of reformation, moral treatment infused asylum life. Physicians served as medical superintendents of asylums and supervised strictly regimented time schedules for their patients. Alienists (the colloquial term for psychiatrists during this time) believed madness to be caused by either physical trauma or lesions to the brain or

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[170] Ibid., 51.

[171] Ibid., 22.

[172] David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum,* xix.

by an immoral lifestyle. Describing the degree to which madness was thought to be caused by an individual's lack of virtue, historian Gerald Grob states, "The major causal factors in mid-nineteenth-century psychiatric thought included intemperance, masturbation, overwork, domestic difficulties, excessive ambitions, faulty education, personal disappointments, marital problems, excessive religious enthusiasm, jealousy, and pride."[173] As Grob indicates, beliefs of immorality as cause for madness held greater potential for transformation; and medical superintendents of asylums as well as their staff were called to model virtuous behavior themselves for their patients' amelioration.[174] And despite asylums' eventual overpopulation of chronic patients dependent on the system for basic amenities (aside from medical care) and the physical buildings' gradual deterioration over several decades, the rise of the asylum in the Jacksonian era harbingered further conflation of insanity and immorality and heralded further attempts to control and discipline those deemed mad.

## Tales of Madness

As the field of psychiatry grew in reputation as a discipline and profession in the 1800s and beyond, small acts of resistance also emerged. Patients resisted the field's interpretation of their seemingly aberrant behavior as madness, rejected normalizing imperatives, and put forth alternative explanations for what they considered to be unfair commitment to insane asylums. This chapter explores some of the writings that help articulate psychiatric resistance movements—namely, the narratives and essays of Elizabeth Packard from the Victorian Age, Judi Chamberlin in the late 1970s, Kate Millet in the early 1990s, and Ashley "Jacks" McNamara whose writings have been taken up within the c/s/x movement, the most recent health social movement of psychiatric

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[173] Gerald N. Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of Care of America's Mentally Ill (*New York City: The Free Press, 1994), 60.
[174] Ibid., 58.

resistance. I chose to feature the narratives of four women, not to imply that the history of the c/s/x movement is rooted solely in the victimization and stigmatization of women's minds and bodies, but because men—husbands, fathers, psychiatrists—historically scrutinized women's rationality intensely, pathologized their behavior liberally, and held the power to forcibly commit them to asylums, with or without good cause. In protesting their victimization at the hands of such men, these women performed their own rationality against the backdrop of what they believed to be irrational, unjust systems and sought to ameliorate the situation of other women and potential psychiatric patients by sharing their own stories in protest, advocating for policy changes, and creating alternative ways to frame diverse mental states.

Rather than charting the history of psychiatry from its humble beginnings in Mesmerism, hypnotism, and phrenology to its later iterations in psychoanalysis, electroshock therapy, insulin shock therapy, and—most recently—biomedical explanations of pathology, I will focus on how these particular conceptualizations of the body and idealizations of the human shaped treatment. In doing so, I emphasize a history of women's understandings of the insanity inherent within the asylum's commitment policies, and contextualize these women writers' experiences amidst greater societal injustices in their time. Additionally, I will argue that in "queering" madness and analyzing narratives that grapple with traumatic psychiatric treatment and call for systemic change, we can destabilize psychiatric epistemologies, avoid simplistic binaries of sane versus insane, examine generative aspects of so-called "madness" historically, and begin to untangle the multiple rationalities at play in resisting such labels. To that end, I will take a closer look at the narratives of the authors mentioned above and use their stories as a starting point to contextualize the c/s/x movement within a larger historical trajectory of former patients' resistance to the imposition of psychiatry.

In addition, I will piece together a history that follows the origin story of psychiatric resistance that members of the c/s/x movements tell for themselves. Judi

Chamberlin, a prominent leader of psychiatric resistance movements during the 1970s and 1980s, gives a history of the c/s/x moment that harkens back to Elizabeth Packard, traces grassroots protests of former psychiatric patients in the 1970s, and looks to the current c/s/x movements as resistance to the imposition of biomedical frameworks for treating what has now been medicalized as mental illness.[175] And, following her lead, I too will weave together a history that pays special attention to the contributions made by women writers to reform and/or resist psychiatry during their time. In contributing to the origin story through which many former patients and activists identify, I hope to acknowledge the achievements of this movement thus far and theorize a collaborative space for cultural production with my research participants in Asheville, North Carolina, as well as their national organization TIP, both of which embody aspects of larger c/s/x movements.

## Pathologization of Women

As feminist critiques of biopsychiatry often point out, women since Ancient times were thought to have a proclivity towards mental illness, as their reproductive organs—especially the uterus—made them more susceptible to fits of emotion and irrational behavior. Beliefs that a wandering uterus caused hysteria continued from Ancient Greece to 18th and 19th century Western Europe.[176] Likewise, the psychiatric practices of the Victorian Era continued these ill-informed beliefs by treating women with a number of "therapeutic" methods including mesmerism, manual "massages," hypnotism, leeching, injections, and cauterization.[177] And, by tracing the role of psychiatry in perpetuating

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[175] Judi Chamberlin, "The Ex-Patients' Movement: Where We've Been and Where We're Going," *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 11, no. 3 (1990), 323-336.

[176] Jan Goldstein, "The Hysteria Diagnosis and the Politics of Anti-clericalism in Late 19th Century France," *Journal of Modern History* 54 (June 1982): 209-239.

[177] Ann Douglas Wood, "The Fashionable Disease: Women's Complaints and their Treatment in 19th Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4 no. 1 (1973): 25-52.

stereotypes about women's bodies and their fragile mental states, the field's hidden—and not so hidden—biases against women become apparent.

In addition, Victorian alienists[178] attempted to control women's sexuality and perpetuated limited social roles for women in domestic spheres.[179] Even within the asylum, English alienists created roles for women that would foster their ability to nurture their families and formed labor markets within asylums to train them to reenter society as good wives and mothers. To this end, feminist historian Elaine Showalter writes, "In line with their celebration of women's domestic role, the Victorians hoped that homelike mental institutions would tame and domesticate madness and bring it into the sphere of rationality."[180] For this reason, many asylums were founded on the moral treatment,[181] the belief that the mad need to be handled with kindness and instilled with virtues that would help them re-enter "proper" society. A presumption within the profession of psychiatry prevailed that living in a home-like environment would help women act more "womanly," and as women were given tasks like doing laundry, sewing, knitting, basket weaving, and baking, psychiatrists reified women's responsibility within gendered labor

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[178] The title psychiatrists were commonly called during this time.

[179] Carol Groneman, "Nymphomania: The Historical Construction of Female Sexuality," *Signs* 19 no. 2 (1994): 337-367.

[180] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady,* 17.

[181] Phillipe Pinel popularized the moral treatment in the 1700s—this therapeutic intervention replaced physical restraints to control the mad with psychological ones. As Michel Foucault notes that with the advent of Phillipe Pinel's moral therapy during the late 1700s, the physical chains for the mad were loosened in France and eventually in other parts of the Western world, as reformations in care encouraged institutional caregivers to model empathic social interactions with their patients models. No longer treated as brutish animals, patients came to uphold this system of power themselves by internalizing a new form of surveillance and discipline of the body to control their own behavior. Foucault describes this dynamic when he writes, "The asylum of the age of positivism, which it is Pinel's glory to have founded, is not a free realm of observation, diagnosis, and therapeutics; it is a juridical space where one is accused, judged and condemned, and from which one is never released except by the version of this trial in psychological depth—that is, by remorse." By conforming to the institution's normalizing goals, patients thus began to perform for themselves the work that the chains once did. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization,* 269.

roles.[182] Moreover, as we will see in later narratives of psychiatric resistance, themes of constructing femininity within a domestic sphere continue to resonate.

## Elizabeth Packard (1816—1897)

It was in this constrictive environment, that Elizabeth Packard found herself committed at Illinois State Asylum at Jacksonville. In 1860, her husband, a devout Calvinist reverend, called a psychiatrist disguised as a sewing machine salesman to come to their house and evaluate her.[183] Mr. Packard's chief compliant about his wife was her religious belief that she should be able to interpret the Scriptures and biblical doctrine for herself and share those views in her community.[184] At the time, state law allowed husbands to commit their wives simply with a psychiatrist's approval; and in her several published writings (some of which she wrote during her three-year stay in the asylum), she advocated for state laws to be changed to allow for trials, in which potential asylum inmates could plead their cases to a jury.[185]

As Mary Elene Wood indicates, during Packard's time, personal experience as evidence became increasingly debated as subjective accounts were increasingly dismissed for more "objective" modes of representation. What is particularly remarkable in Packard's legal success was that her advocacy work was premised on her phenomenological experience (and the experience of women in similar situations) entering the asylum. Explaining the epistemological dynamics of the time, Wood writes,

> As medicine and psychology became more professionalized, experts encouraged
> the average citizen to depend more and more on their ability to interpret the
> "facts" of human behavior and the human mind. Experience itself—the individual

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182 Ibid., 41.

183 Mary Elene Wood, *The Writing on the Wall: Women's Autobiography and the Asylum*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 25.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.

interpretation of perception, essential to the constitution of the Lockean self—was increasingly seen as untrustworthy, unless it was accompanied by expert training and knowledge.[186]

As Wood describes, Lockean conceptions of the self, in which representational thinking is a subjective, individual experience, became increasingly questioned during this time.[187] Subjective, psychoanalytic interpretations of mental distress gave way to positivist approaches during the 19th century. With these epistemic changes in mind, Packard's writings and her eventual success in passing state laws to protect potential inmates from forced admission stand as a testament to the power of personal narrative in public appeals for social justice and the protection against married women's forced commitment to asylums.

In *The Prisoner's Hidden Life, Or Insane Asylums Unveiled*, Packard exemplifies the power of religion, medicine, and law in the following account of an exchange with her husband, immediately before her commitment to the Illinois State Asylum:

> My husband replied, "I am doing as the laws of Illinois allow me to do—you have no protector in law but myself, and I am protecting you now! it is for your good I am doing this, I want to save your soul—you don't believe in total depravity, and I want to make you right."
> "Husband, have I not a right to my opinions?"
> "Yes, you have a right to your opinions, if you think right."
> "But does not the constitution defend the right of religious toleration to all American citizens?"
> "Yes, to all citizens it does defend this right, but you are not a citizen; while a married woman you are a legal nonentity, without even a soul in law. In short, you are dead as to any legal existence while a married woman, and therefore have no legal protection as a married woman." Thus I learned my first lesson in that

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186 Ibid., 38.

187 For Locke, and fitting in to so much of neoliberalism, representational thinking is individual and in some sense independent of truth (we can be wrong in what we think—and we can be the only one who is right).

chapter of common law, which denies to married woman a legal right to her own identity or individuality."[188]

We may begin to question Packard's accuracy in her recollections of such events, and it remains doubtful in this passage and in others that she provides a verbatim retelling of her commitment.[189] Still, what is important to note about this rather artificial exchange with her husband, is that Packard uses this dramatic account as a way to rhetorically ground her later call for public trials in a court of law, so that patients in question could advocate for themselves, seek legal assistance, and prove their sanity prior to commitment in an asylum.[190]

Elizabeth Packard found moderate success in her campaign for psychiatric trials. After her confinement in the asylum, she was discharged, made a living off her writings, and helped pass laws in Illinois and many other states.[191]  Describing her achievements, she writes,

> . . . in the winter of 1867, I came alone, and at my own expense, from
> Massachusetts to Illinois, and paid my board all winter in Springfield, Illinois,
> trying to induce the Legislature to repeal the barbarous law under which I was
> imprisoned, and pass in its stead a "Bill for the Protection of Personal Liberty,"

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[188] Elizabeth Parson Ware Packard, "The Prisoner's Hidden Life, Or Insane Asylums Unveiled: As Demonstrated by the Report of the Investigating Committee of the Legislature of Illinois. Together with Mrs. Packard's Coadjutors' Testimony in A Mad People's History of Madness," ed. Dale Peterson (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 1982), 125.

[189] A mother of three, she also gives an account of her son George tears streaming when he returns home to find that his mother has been taken away, even though there was no way for to have witness that event.

[190] As Mary Elene Wood remarks, Packard's narrative has characteristics of an epistolary sentimental novel in which, "a virtuous woman is victimized by an unfeeling rake," and shares similar "strategies of spiritual autobiography, captivity narrative, and slave narrative (which itself draws on spiritual autobiography), strategies in which the writing voice presents itself as coherent and sane even as it occasionally disappears into selflessness before the story it tells and the spiritual power it invokes."
See Mary Elene Wood, *The Writing on the Wall,* 27.

[191] Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, 73.

which demands a fair jury trial of every citizen of the State, before imprisonment in any Insane Asylum in the State. The Legislature granted my request. They repealed the barbarous law, and passed the Personal Liberty Bill, by an unanimous vote of both houses. So that now, no wife or mother in Illinois need fear the re-enacting of my sad drama in her own case; for, thank God! your personal liberty is now protected by just laws.[192]

Despite her victories passing measures to protect potential asylum inmates in several states, only a few decades later, liberal progressives retracted the law of granting a trial prior to psychiatric admissions. Legislators thought these trials to be potentially stigmatizing and publicly embarrassing to families of those thought to be mentally ill.[193] It is worth noting that in perpetuating neoliberal technology which placed responsibility upon the individual to prove herself sane in the court of law, measures in the name of liberty remained confining and limiting in their own way, with little real difference within a system of internalized metrics of separating the mad from the sane.

Packard's depiction of her time in the asylum, along with the stories of five other seemingly "sane" women she met there, illustrates an environ(mental) niche in which she clearly perceived the injustices of forced or coerced admission on the part of their husbands, and more broadly, the lack of rights and a basic sense of identity and individuality given to married women at the time. Packard sought to work within the governmental system of her time and fought for incremental changes within public policies towards commitment in asylums. In resisting her husband and her psychiatrist's diagnosis of insanity, she did not deny the presence of those actually "insane" and in need of alienists' treatment. Rather, she questioned the circumstances through which wives could be so easily dismissed by their husbands and psychiatrists' complicity with such forced commitments. (In this aspect, she took a much less radical position towards questioning the existence of mental illness than the activists who later draw from her

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192 Elizabeth Parson Ware Packard, "The Prisoner's Hidden Life*,"* 129.

193 Mary Elene Wood, *The Writing on the Wall, 63.*

initial work and claim her as their progenitor.) Packard thus towed a careful line between legitimizing certain practices in psychiatry, even while defining herself in opposition to the mad and further stigmatizing others as insane.

## Judi Chamberlin (1944-2010)

As one of the early critics of psychiatric institutions, Packard and her writings held traction for activists like Judi Chamberlin during the 1970s, as she sought to shed light on longstanding critiques of forced admission and to piece together an origin story of psychiatric resistance to further ground her own work in patient advocacy.[194] Discussing Packard's case, among others, Chamberlin writes, "On the whole . . . this early history is obscure, and the development of modern ex-patient groups in the United States at the beginning of the 1970's occurred primarily without any knowledge of these historical roots."[195]  Still, she points to the creation of Alleged Lunatics' Friend Society in the 1840s, Packard's Anti-Insane Asylum Society in Illinois (which never gained traction as an organization), and Clifford Beers' account that led to the development of the National Committee on Mental Hygiene in 1909 (later known as National Association for Mental Health.[196] Despite her acknowledgement of the tenuous links between these movements, she places critiques led by the patient rights movement within a little known, yet significant, precedence of resistance to totalizing psychiatric institutions. And here, whether rooted in Packard's writings and in other historical acts of resistance or conceptualized as a dandelion seed's line of flight—a radical offshoot, tangentially connected to a cultural and political underground—Chamberlin's work itself performs a schizoanalysis: the historical connections she makes form an "art of the new" that, in

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194  Judi Chamberlin, "The Ex-Patients' Movement, " 323-336.

195 Ibid., 324.

196 Manon Parry, "Clifford Whittingham Beers' Work to Reform Mental Health Services," *American Journal of Public Health* 100 no.12 (December 2010): 2356-2357.

some way, reveals a desire for connecting her work in the patient rights movement within older narratives of psychiatric resistance.[197] And regardless of how peripheral or little known the history with which she finds connection, we find many parallels between Chamberlin's deep distrust of turning personal troubles into cause for unwanted medical imposition and similar claims made by psychiatric survivors who preceded her.

Chamberlin considered herself to be a "psychiatric survivor." Diagnosed with schizophrenia and committed to a state hospital, Chamberlin writes that she never experienced therapeutic benefits from psycho-pharmaceuticals and protested her forced admission in the 1960s. By 1971, she was working with the Mental Patients' Liberation Project in New York; and her 1978 work *On Our Own: Patient Controlled Alternatives to the Mental Health System* served as a touchstone for activists in the budding health social movement against psychiatry, in what later became termed the c/s/x movement and the Mad Pride movement.[198] She writes,

> We psychiatric patients… are usually assumed not to know what is best for us, and to need supervision and control. We are often assumed to be talking in code; only so called "experts" can figure out what we "really" mean. A patient who refuses psychiatric drugs may have very good reasons—the risk of tardive dyskinesia, for example, or the experience of too many undesirable negative effects. But professionals often assume that we are expressing a symbolic rebellion of some sort when we try to give a straightforward explanation of what we want and what we do not want.[199]

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[197] Chamberlin continued to publish several works on empowerment and self-help approaches for stabilizing mental states until the late 1990s. See Judi Chamberlin, "A Working Definition of Empowerment," *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 43-46; Judi Chamberlin, "Citizenship Rights and Psychiatric Disability," *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 21, no. 4 (1998): 405-408; Judi Chamberlin, "Community Relations," in *Reaching Across: Mental Health Clients Helping Each Other*, ed. S. Zinman, H. Harp, S. Budd (Sacramento, CA: California Network of Mental Health Clients, 1987), 79-85; Judi Chamberlin, "Self-Help Programs: A Description of Their Characteristics and Their Members, *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 19, no. 3 (1996), 33-42.

[198] See Judi Chamberlin, *On Our Own: Patient-Controlled Alternatives to the Mental Health System* (New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1978).

[199] Judi Chamberlin, "Confessions of a Noncompliant Patient," *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing* 36, no. 4 (1998), 49-52.

In this passage, we can see how professionals "translated" the language patients used in the 1970s through the medical gaze and interpreted their non-compliance as further "proof" of pathology; yet, in emphasizing detrimental side effects of the psychiatric medication, Chamberlin posits rationalities for not wanting to accept psycho-pharmaceutical intervention and pits the rationality of biomedical psychiatry against the suffering she endures from the negative effects of medication on her body. In so doing, she also posits a biomedical critique of psychiatry that questions the premise of an underlying individual, neurochemical imbalance in light of greater social determinates of her mental health.

Thus, like Packard, Chamberlin uses her embodied experience as a way of rooting political calls to address mental health at a community level. Throughout her work as an advocate and social researcher, Chamberlin refers to the phenomenology of her medicated life and the inability of psycho-pharmaceuticals to ameliorate her physical and mental states,

> One of the things I had already discovered in my journey through various hospitals, which culminated in my involuntary commitment to the state hospital, was that psychiatric drugs did not help me. Every drug I was given made me feel worse, not better. They made me fat, lethargic, unable to think or to remember. When I could, I refused drugs. Before I got committed. I used to hide the pills in my cheek and spit them out when I was alone. In the state hospital, however, I did not dare to try this trick. I dutifully swallowed the pills hating the way they made me feel, knowing that, once I was free, I would stop taking them. Once again, I was noncompliant in thought before I could be noncompliant in deed.[200]

The irony of taking psychiatric drugs to improve her state and feeling worse from taking them is not lost on Chamberlin. Describing her small act of resistance in refusing to take the medication and recognizing their detrimental effects on her ability to function in the

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200 Ibid., 49-50.

world, she draws from her embodied knowledge of being a patient and fearing the repercussions for not obeying psychiatrists' prescriptions.

Chamberlin's many encounters with psychiatric institutions must be understood through the lens of events surrounding the field's metamorphosis beginning in the mid-1900s. Namely, the growth and development of the psycho-pharmaceutical industry in the 1950s and onward,[201] the anti-psychiatry movement, the deinstutionalization movement spurred by President John F. Kennedy's reforms,[202] a major paradigm shift in 1980 from dynamic psychotherapy (premised on psychoanalytic theories seeking to reveal the unconscious desires of the self) to biomedical psychiatry in the United States[203], and the co-evolution of diagnostic categories in the DSM III alongside psycho-pharmaceutical treatments and marketing campaigns in the 1980s and onward[204]—all of these shifts revolutionized the industry and contributed greatly to the troubling ecological niche in which Chamberlin and Kate Millet—who I will discuss later—sought treatment. Because numerous scholars have described these forces in great depth,[205] for the purposes of this chapter, I will limit my discussion of these major shifts to the effects of declining popularity of psychoanalytic or dynamic therapy and the rise of biomedical treatments for what the medical establishment perceived to be disordered mental states.

The prevalence of biomedical psychiatry during the 1960s is key to understanding Chamberlin's environ(mental) niche in which she became embittered by her ineffective treatment over the many years she lived in psychiatric institutions. Her primary form of

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[201] Allan V. Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness*, 78-79.

[202] Gerald Grob, *Mad Among Us,* 251-260.

[203] Mitchell Wilson, "DSM-III and the Transformation of American Psychiatry: A History," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 150 (1993): 399-410; Robert Whitaker, *Anatomy of an Epidemic,* 269-270; Clark Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: a History of Depression*. (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 165-170;

[204] Sascha Altman DuBrul, *Maps to the Other Side: The Adventures of a Bipolar Cartographer* (Portland, OR: Microcosm Publishing, 2013), 163-166.

[205] David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs,* 187-209;.Jonathan Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis,* 133-136; Bradley Lewis, *Depression,* 72-74.

treatment—technologies of medication and hospitalization—proved to be detrimental to the amelioration of her symptoms and further exacerbated the self-doubt and insecurity she felt about reintegrating into society.[206] Rather than acknowledging her challenging life situations and the draining emotional ecology she inhabited—which included a difficult relationship with her husband, an unfulfilling job, the stress of living in New York City, and a devastating miscarriage, psychiatrists prescribed her a number of drugs for sleep and tranquilization, often without her knowledge of the pill's intended consequences.[207]

Chamberlin's encounters with the psychiatric systems in New York were by no means exceptional. Describing the great transformation of psychiatry during the latter half of the twentieth century, Allen Horowitz indicates the many reasons why biomedical psychiatry rapidly gained clout within psychiatric wards, treatment centers, and private practices, while dynamic psychiatry—the practice of talk therapy—began to fall by the wayside:

> "Legitimate" disorders [as understood by the biomedical paradigm] have discrete boundaries, are linked to specific underlying etiologies, and can be treated through physical means. The vague continua of [psycho]analytic disorders had none of these features. In fact the symbolic, verbal, private, and interior essence of dynamic psychiatry was in many ways the opposite of the direct, objective, public, and overt emphasis of classical scientific methods. The new norms of biomedicine could no longer encompass the claim that dynamic psychiatry was a branch of medicine.[208]

As Horowitz indicates, the ability of biomedical paradigm to observe, diagnose, and treat mental "abnormalities" scientized the practice of psychiatry; and in valuing epistemologies that could be quantified and commodified, the biomedical model delegitimized dynamic therapy in American culture and brought more and more people

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[206] Judi Chamberlin, *On Our Own,* 6-7.
[207] Ibid., 22-42.
[208] Allan V. Horwitz, *Creating Mental Illness*, 59.

under its fold as increasing numbers of the population were thought to be "at risk" for mental illness.

Throughout her writings, Chamberlin—aligning herself with the disabilities movement—declared "Nothing about us without us," remained adamant that patients should have autonomy in making decisions about their health care, and advocated for laws to eliminate forced admission and forced treatment.[209] Envisioning a tight-knit community of mutual support, shared decision-making, and patient-controlled facilities to right what she perceived as the wrongs of psychiatry, she asserts,

> … we must welcome back into our communities even those so damaged by years of psychiatric incarceration that they may always remain a bit different, a little odd. Only by bringing an end to the mental hospital system can we prevent a new generation of these chronic patients, people who have been lost behind the walls that have hidden psychiatry's mistakes for too long. Only by building a network of real, community-based alternatives will we be able to prevent today's troubled people from being similarly damaged and crippled.[210]

Greater acceptance of a diverse range of peoples' ways of being in the world and a depathologization of varied mental states remain core tenants of her message in her seminal book. And because she wanted to see local groups build grassroots support for such intentional communities, Chamberlin does not detail here how such organizations should be structured or how such groups could provide sustainable, long-term solutions for people dealing with diverse mental states.[211]

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[209] Of note, Chamberlin did not deny that medical interventions may help some psychiatric patients, just spoke to her negative experiences within psychiatric wards. See Judi Chamberlin, *On Our Own,* 7.

[210] Judi Chamberlin, *On Our Own,* 218.

[211] In fact, because Kennedy's community health centers—which were intended to replace state psychiatric hospitals—never gained prominence Chamberlin and other psychiatic activists envisioned, the homeless population in the United States burgeoned at an alarming rate in the 1980s and 1990s. See Gerald Grob, *Mad Among Us, 256*-265.

Still, Chamberlin saw peer-to-peer support within alternative crisis centers as a way of challenging the hierarchical structures of medicine and the instruments they used to treat diverse mental states. Throughout her career as an activist, she remained adamant that former patients should be careful to avoid reifying the hierarchies they are working against. Warning against the potential for further perpetuating the culture of surveillance and control within medicine to intentional communities, Chamberlin writes,

> We must distinguish true alternatives from mini-mental institutions and work to ensure that community facilities are controlled by their communities and by their clients, not by a centralized psychiatric bureaucracy. "Community" facilities, too, can have locked doors and rigid, hierarchical structures; they, too, can dehumanize and control. We must demand only services that are responsive to their communities and their clients, alternatives that differ from one another to meet local and individual needs Otherwise, we will not have solved the problem; we will have changed only the terminology, and we will continue to dehumanize troubled people.[212]

Her warnings against the instrumentalization of peer support remain especially relevant in understanding some of the challenges associated with grassroots organizing, and in later chapters, these challenges, such as tensions between arborescent and more rhizomatic structures of assemblage, will be discussed more thoroughly in the context of TIP and current power dynamics within its local and national groups. For now, it will suffice to note that there is a problem of merely contesting one injustice (of forced treatment or involuntary commitment) without questioning the whole dynamic of technologies which constrain ontological diversity. Until there is an understanding that interventions are about the ecological conditions upon which individual decisions are predicated, similar neoliberal structures that focus on individual control and choice remain—in a sense—interchangeable: One technology (peer support) can replace the

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[212] Judi Chamberlin, *On Our Own,* 219.

other (psychiatric interventions), yet the real process of listening and being with suffering is lost in the demand that are more or less authentic ways of speaking.

## Kate Millet (1934—)

Kate Millet, a contemporary of Chamberlin, also lived in the time of civil rights, patients' rights, women's rights, and gay rights movements and was greatly inspired by the great social changes of the 1960s and 1970s.[213] Her 1969 book *Sexual Politics,* adapted from her Ph.D. dissertation in Literature at Columbia, served as a touchstone for feminist analysis of Western literature, provided a scathing critique of psychoanalytic theories that perpetuated dehumanizing tropes of femininity, and soon became a classic work of second wave feminism. In addition to her scholarly work, Millet challenged uniformly individualistic views of mental health and resisted her diagnosis of bipolar disorder throughout her life. An outspoken radical in her vilification of psychiatric institutions, Millet joined the anti-psychiatry movement in the 1980s to denounce biomedical treatment as an immoral form of social control that has done much more violence to patients than it has helped them.[214] And, in later years, she became involved

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[213] Chamberlin's book *On Our Own* inspired the development of grassroots organizations that sought to implement community alternatives to psychiatric institutions, including Support Coalition International. Millet and Chamberlin both served as representatives of Support Coalition International (now known as MindFreedom International), an organization started in the early 1990s to "win human rights campaigns in mental health, challenge abuse by the psychiatric drug industry, support the self-determination of psychiatric survivors and mental health consumers, and promote safe, humane and effective options in mental health." Support Coalition International began as a fairly traditional anti-psychiatry/activist watchdog organization, but MindFreedom is now trying to appeal to younger audiences and broaden their scope through a more inclusive stance towards "psychiatric survivors, mental health consumers/users, and their allies." See MindFreedom International, "Who We Are," accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.mindfreedom.org/who-we-are; Jonah Bossewitch, Skype conversation with author, April 5, 2014.

[214] Kate Millet, *The Loony-Bin Trip* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 73. Many anti-psychiatry activists contend that their protest and scathing critiques of psychiatry were largely separate from the intellectual movement offering similar critiques in the 1950s and 1960s. Still others claim that scholars such as Michel Foucault, R. D. Laing, Thomas

in MindFreedom International and represented their organization at the United Nation delegations on disabilities and human rights. [215]

Self-identified as a bisexual woman, Millet was well aware of the historic oppression of women and viewed her forced admissions to psychiatric wards—in some way—as punishment for her thwarting of social norms and refusal to perform "proper" gender roles. Rather than accepting internal pathology, she pointed out an external, societal pathology of heternormativity and liberal paternalism and sought to reclaim her own nature and culture. In diagnosing her ecology as pathological, Millet refuses to accept the diagnosis of manic-depressive disorder and the regime of self-medication and therapy that it entails, and uses the writing process as a way of discovering for herself the actions she took to cause others to become skeptical of her mental state. In her pointed memoir *The Looney-Bin Trip*, she details her whirlwind adventure across the United States and Europe and externalizes the causes for her forced admission into mental hospitals by blaming the "organization" of "police, psychiatry, family, property, religion, state medicine" for her incarceration.[216]

Describing her decision to make her story public, Millet states that writing helped her process this tumultuous time in her life:

> I wrote *The Looney-Bin Trip* to go back over the ground and discover whether I did go mad. Went mad or was driven crazy—that differentiation. But it is not so cut and dried, cannot be. And if I did go mad, even acknowledging latitude and overlap, then what was madness, the irrational, what was it like? Experientially, rolling back the secret and shame, remembering.[217]

Szasz, and Erving Goffman articulated core tenants of anti-psychiatry and cite these scholars' words and ideas in justifying their own presence as a movement.

[215] David Oaks, "A MindFreedom Delegation in the United Nations for Meetings on Disability and Human Rights," MindFreedom International, last modified January 16, 2006, accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.mindfreedom.org/kb/mental-health-global/mfi-united-nations/.

[216] Kate Millet, *The Loony-Bin Trip*, 229.

[217] Ibid., 313.

Millet, herself, recognizes the tensions within her writings (as evidenced in the quote above), yet still believes that whatever actions, aspects of her personality, or even insanity that may have led her close friends to have her institutionalized, her experiences within the mental health care system were inhumane. For Millet, writing becomes a form of remembering, a way of justifying her actions and condemning those around her for quelling her freedom.

Still, her choppy, acerbic writing style, long tangents, and biting diatribes against "The System" also take on an agency of their own, and—perhaps for some readers— work against Millet's goals to prove her sanity. Her writing style, at times manic itself, works paradoxically to make insightful, incisive critiques of mental institutions while conversely embodying the very "disorder" it seeks to deny. Below is an example of the paradoxical role her writing plays. In the conclusion of her memoir, Millet writes,

> …I bring together my own experience and that of the multitude who like me have known the cruelty and irrationality of this [medical] system, that I may plead for a new respect for the human mind itself, its reason, intelligence, perception acumen, and logic. Let there be no more forced hospitalization, drugging electroshock, no more definitions of insanity as a crime to be treated with savage methods. No more state intervention into grief or ecstasy. Let sanity be understood to be a spectrum that runs the full course between balancing one's checkbook on the one hand and fantasy on the other. Possibly higher mathematics as well . . . To one side reasoning, equations, expository prose. To the other, theater, painting, déjà vu, recollection. A spectrum. A rainbow. All human. All good or at least morally indifferent. Places within the great, still-unexplored country of the mind. None to be forbidden. None to be punished. None to be feared. If we go mad—so what? We would come back again if not chased away, exiled, isolated, confined.[218]

Through following her meandering prose, we can experience the multiplicity of her experiences, a fragmentation she recognizes in herself, and a third space between strict dualities of the sane and insane.

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[218] Ibid., 314.

In her outright rejection of biomedical language for mental illness and what she considered to be masculinist aspects of psychoanalytic thought, she chose a language of protest, which forcefully portrays such therapeutic interventions as disciplining power over oneself. Never at ease with her diagnosis, Millet points at the normalizing (and moralizing) that undergirds psychiatric treatment,

> Refuse a pill and you will be tied down and given a hypodermic by force. Enforced irrationality. With all the force of the state behind it, pharmaceutical corporations, and an entrenched bureaucratic psychiatry. Unassailable social beliefs, general throughout the culture. And all the scientific prestige of medicine. Locks, bars, buildings, cops. A massive system.[219]

Her writing style reads like a manifesto, a call to arms, as she fights to end forced hospitalizations and the stigmatization of those deemed insane. In naming the paradox of "enforced irrationality" and detailing a deeply personal account of her lived experience, Millet gives voice to the struggles of those deemed mad who assert themselves against professionals who seek to impose their understandings of madness upon their patients.

Millet's attempt to position herself as "sane" and the rest of her world as "insane" throughout her memoir raises difficult questions about the ethics of forced admission and the normalizing apparatus of state and medical regimes of power within her "treatment." Her cognizance and articulation of the critiques of "The System" often levied during the anti-psychiatry movement add a forceful poignancy to her writing, yet it remains difficult to believe that the concerns raised by her loved ones were not in some way founded. For this reason, notions of rationality and reliability remain complicated to decipher within her narratives, and point to an unlikelihood for us as readers to ever stand completely over and against past diagnoses of mental illness. Thus, Millet, even in my own reading of her, is continually interpolated through the veil of medicalization.

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[219] Ibid., 241.

## Ashley "Jacks" McNamara (1981—)

My best friend and I used to talk
about choosing earth and sky
we traveled between borders leading
workshops for survivors
who had known rocks that whisper
billboards who shot conspiracies
and cosmic truths, electric hearts
impaled on apocalypse sunsets
over ruined cities and paper mountains
speaking myths that evaporate
like water off hot pavement
when you finally come down

into the world of toothpaste and toilet paper
father and sons
appointments, diagnoses –
mania, psychosis – but we knew
we were caught trying to fly
out of the mazes built by kinds and corporations
where your wings melt
once you finally make it over the sea.

When we mentioned keeping one foot
in both worlds, everyone in the room
would exhale
eyes like fireflies
switching on at dusk.
Permission. This too is real.
Inbetweenland. Both. Our own maps.
You don't have to choose
between sanity and the roofless night.

—Ashley "Jacks" McNamara[220]

Despite my attempts to root TIP within c/s/x movements, what is rather unique about this group is that they largely began without such an understanding of larger historical trajectories in a traditional academic sense. They were not "unaware" of their

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[220] Ashley "Jacks" McNamara, "Inbetweenland," in *Inbetweenland* (Oakland, CA: Deviant Type Press, 2013), 44.

origins, but spoke differently about their motivations to start the organization, in a way that did not seek to be legitimated or validated by the academy. Rather, popular culture—through word of mouth, punk music, 'zines, and other modes of discourse informed their approaches to psychiatry. Drawing from the empty shell of language left behind following the anti-psychiatry movement, TIP responded to the call to speak and to say what needed to be said in their own terms, to invent a language which had the potential to foster a more nuanced approach to technology, and to embody other ways of being in the world.

In 2002, Ashley "Jacks" McNamara and Sascha DuBrul Altman co-founded TIP. The following year, they launched a website and an interactive online forum, where people could share their experiences, participate in social activism, and raise awareness about bipolar disorder (see Chapter 4). At the time, they were not well-versed in the anti-psychiatry movement, but they sought to define themselves against traditional organizations like the National Alliance for Mental Illness, which takes a highly biomedical understanding of diverse mental states and is funded largely through pharmaceutical companies, and against radical organizations hegemonically opposed to psychiatry like MindFreedom International (then named Support Coalition International) whose rhetoric did not easily allow for those who embraced aspects of psychiatry while deploring its abuses.[221] Rather, McNamara and DuBrul aimed to create discussion about the generative aspects of bipolar disorder, the benefits and side-effects of taking Lithium and other medication, and alternative (non-medical) ways for moderating mental states.

Overwhelmed by the interest generated about TIP, McNamara and DuBrul began facilitating art shows, tours, and meetup groups to discuss their ideas. As both founders learned more about the anti-psychiatry movement and the c/s/x movements, they gained a

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[221] MindFreedom is a grassroots organization that advocates against involuntary commitment to psychiatric wards, forced medication, and electric shock therapy. See MindFreedom International, "Who We Are."

deeper cultural and historical perspective of their niche within these movements—one that gradually opened the group up to all people who considered themselves to have diverse mental states, and attempted to work collectively to carve out alternative languages outside of the biomedical paradigm.[222]

In their (preferred third-person pronoun) attempt to create such alternative languages, McNamara's poetry and prose also reveals a richly cultivated perspective that situated individual troubles in their environ(mental) niche within the historical and cultural dynamics at play in their life. Growing up in an abusive family and coming of age in Virginia and Maryland during the 1990s, McNamara felt little support in coming to terms with their feelings of deep sadness and bouts of heightened activity or for "coming out" to their friends and family as queer. During a recent interview, they explain,

> I would say for me the intersection of oppression around gender and sex and around my sexual choices deeply impacted my mental health . . . Because of all the harassment and the homophobia and the bullshit I had a ton of shame. I internalized a lot of the things I had been told by my family . . . that I was ugly because I looked like a man; that nobody would ever love me. I mean these were things that were said outright. I think that a lot of queer people, even if the level of homophobia and harassment they deal with isn't as overt, still internalize a lot of messages that it's not safe for us to be in this world; that the love we have isn't safe; that we are ugly or different or unlovable. That hugely affects our mental health, hugely affects our ability to feel like we belong in the human race and whether we have any idea how to grow up and live lives that we actually want to live.[223]

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[222] When McNamara and DuBrul first promoting The Icarus Project across the United States, David Oakes, the executive director of MindFreedom at the time, accused them of advertising the benefits of psychopharmaceuticals and doing free marketing for drug companies; and, in the early days of the movement, mainstream psychiatry saw The Icarus Project as quite radical while members of the anti-psychiatry movement saw the group as being far too conservative. Jonah Bossewitch, Skype conversation with author, April 5, 2014.

[223] Ashley "Jacks" McNamara. Interview with Nina Packebush. October 1, 2013. Accessed on May 18, 2014. http://literarykitchen.com/?p=557.

Here McNamara "queers" madness by naming societal stressors that contribute to mental distress and recognizes their own difficulties accepting themselves and flourishing within a hostile environment.[224] Like other writers discussed in this chapter, their struggle with identity is deeply rooted in their inability and discomfort in performing certain aspects of femininity and harkens to the oppressive aspects of heteronormativity, as well as the American Psychiatric Association's past denunciation of homosexuality and other sexual orientations as a mental disease.[225]

Seeking languages beyond the biomedical model of mental illness, McNamara uses art—poetry, paintings, and prose—to communicate their lived experience of varying mental states. In an Artist Statement on their website, they write,

> My art is an attempt to find visual language for the paradox of wonder and tension in a fragmented world…Often the pieces articulate an outline of contested and persistent space—what we carve out from what we are given, what manages to resist the encroaching darknesses of modern life. The works become improvised diagrams for the connections between the incidents of grace and loss that mark a life lived between hope, despair, and constant contradictions, punctuated intermittently with the open expanse of sky and the resilience of growing things.[226]

[224] Similarly, Ann Cvetkovich in *An Archive of Feelings* offers a way to accept all kinds of mental suffering and argues for an expansive understanding of emotional responses to traumatic events in life. Seeking a method that goes beyond what she sees as limited biomedical or psychoanalytic perspectives for understanding mental states, she uses the language of trauma taken from queer theory to disavow simplistic understandings of illness and health and to describe factors that exacerbate mental anguish. Cvetkovich attempts to create an alternative space to understand mental distress when she explains, "Rather than diagnosis or cure, the goal is the development of rich and varied ways to talk about emotional experience as social experience. Trauma is a window onto the study of how historical experience is embedded in sensational experience and how affective experience can form the basis for culture." In expanding the reach for what she generally calls "feeling bad," she broadens the reach of her "archive of feelings" to include those who accept the label of mental illness and those who experience mental distress while refusing the medical gaze. See Ann Cvetkovich. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 285.

[225] Stuart Kirk and Herb Hutchins, *The Selling of DSM,* 88.

[226] Ashley "Jacks" McNamara, "Artist's Statement," accessed on May 18, 2014, http://www.ashley-mcnamara.net/content/artists-statement.

Likewise, TIP curated a number of art shows both on and offline featuring contributors to their community. As Sascha DuBrul points outs, TIPs taps into a radical, anarchist DIY (Do-It-Yourself) culture; and in the paradoxical space of embracing individual liberty while building community, the organization and its founders tow a delicate balance between medication and mediation (in creative expression), diversity and solidarity, resistance and acceptance.[227] In creating a space for artistic practice and recognizing an aesthetic quality towards a plethora of mental states, McNamara and TIP also take a political stance towards the creation of art as a way to heal, to form community, and to reshape frameworks for grappling with trauma, emotion, and vision.

To that end, McNamara also collaborated with Ken Paul Rosenthal, a filmmaker and contributor to TIP, on a film entitled *Crooked Beauty*.[228]

> Saying that it is nothing but a biological brain disorder lets everybody off the hook, you know, and then you don't have to look at oppression. And you don't have to look at oppression, and you don't have to look at poverty and injustice and abuse and trauma. And makes it this situation where it's just the individual against their inevitable, biological madness.[229]

McNamara has voluntarily used psycho-pharmaceuticals during periods of their life to help moderate what they consider to be "poly-polar" states. [230] Even while recognizing the normalizing effects of capitalism and medicine, in their interactions with the field of psychiatry and with contributors to TIP, they take a nuanced approach towards

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[227] Sascha Altman Dubrul, "The Icarus Project," 263.

[228] *Crooked Beauty*, directed by Ken Paul Rosenthal. (2011; San Francisco, CA: Ken Paul Rosenthal, 2011), DVD.

[229] Ibid.

[230] Ashley "Jacks" McNamara, Interview with Nina Packebush.

medication—neither denouncing people who do take their prescriptions nor encouraging people off medication to seek psycho-pharmaceutical treatment. [231]

McNamara's work particularly interests me because of its open-endedness. McNamara makes no claim about best practices for individual treatment, nor do they deny the role of societal or environmental stressors that contribute to pathology within American society as a whole. Their story gives shape to c/s/x movements without itself being prescriptive, abrasive, or heavy-handed in its critique of psychiatric treatment. They do not shirk away from the technology of psycho-pharmaceutical treatment when they feel it is necessary to utilize them, nor do they shirk away from the technology of website development, which has allowed them to promote their art. And yet through these technological means, they are able to trouble their personal relationship to psychiatry and organize with others in search for solidarity in the face of mental suffering. In this way, we can be see the technogenic entanglements through which McNamara connects their personal experiences to political ills. We can follow their

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[231] The Icarus Project published *A Harm Reduction Guide to Coming Off Psychiatric Drugs* in 2007 and a second edition in 2012. In it, they acknowledge the importance for people who wish to taper off mediation to do so "at their own pace and on their own terms." Will Hall provides the following description of harm reduction in the context of mental health:

> Harm reduction is an international movement in community health education that recognizes there is no single solution for each person, no universal standard of "success" or "failure." Getting rid of the problem is not necessarily the only way. Instead, harm reduction accepts where people are at and educates them to make informed choices and calculated trade-offs that reduce risk and increase wellness. People need information, options, resources and support so they can move towards healthier living–at their own pace and on their own terms. Applying harm reduction philosophy to mental health is a new but growing approach. It means not always trying to eliminate "symptoms" or discontinue all medication. It recognizes that people are already taking psychiatric drugs, already trying to come off them, and already living with symptoms—and that in this complicated reality people need true help, not judgment. It encourages balancing the different risks involved: the harm from extreme states, as well as the harm from treatments such as adverse drug effects, disempowering labels, and traumatic hospitalization.

See Will Hall, *Harm Reduction Guide to Coming Off of Psychiatric Drugs*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: The Icarus Project and The Freedom Center, 2012), 7.

journey into posthuman emotional ecologies as they attempted to build a community of likeminded "mad" people online.

## Reading Unruly Texts

Life was supposed to be different. It should be fair
and somewhat rational. There should be rules
and predictable outcomes. Hungry people
should be fed, sad people
should be held, rich people
should be generous, sick people
should be healed, all people
should be free. Clearly, I was crazy.
Clearly, I did not understand the way things work.
Tree-hugging liberal bleeding-heart leftist weirdo freak
radical dyke wingnut bohemian dreamer.

—Ashley "Jacks" McNamara[232]

The narratives discussed above resist the imposition of diagnostic categories and prescriptive treatments for mental illness. Their authors, along with many others, give voice to modern health social movements (HSMs) within psychiatry, and beyond. Describing heath social movements, Phil Brown and Stephen Zavestoski write, "In challenging scientific and medical authority structure, HSMs focus on the frequent medicalization of social problems, increasing scientization in which technical solutions are provided instead of social solutions, and a burgeoning corporatisation that takes many decisions out of people's hands, including what would be considered appropriate care." Thus, as historically marginalized people come together and join forces, they—women, immigrants, LGTBQ, indigenous groups, people of color, people with disabilities, etc.— create spaces to resist, grapple, and engage with current medical practices and imagine other worlds with alternative attitudes, languages, customs, and orientations towards mental distress.

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[232] McNamara, "Lovesong for Mama" in *Inbetweenland*, 34.

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While reading these narratives, we must consider the history of psychiatry as one fraught with instances of the unnecessary pathologization of nonconformist behavior and non-consensus realities as mental illness, just has there are a great number whose mental suffering has been greatly ameliorated by psychiatric interventions and their lives furthered by the security and protection psychiatric wards have offered them. We must also recognize which stories have been excluded from histories of resistance, why certain (white) authors had the social capital to publish their accounts, and how—for example—the libidinal economies of white women have often been pitted against black men.[233] Furthermore, we must also consider the deleterious effects such narratives—and more broadly, the anti-psychiatry movement—have played in efforts from conservatives and liberals to deinstitutionalize psychiatric treatment and close down many state asylums in the United States: the unintended consequences of which contributed to a swell in homelessness among young adults, illegal drug use, and the criminalization and incarceration of those deemed mentally ill.[234]

Still, in the liminal space between madness and sanity, resistance narratives generate a productive space where personal experiences illuminate the criminalization, medicalization, and scientization of social problems and where women deemed mad perform their sanity and justify their behavior within unjust systems of power.[235] Their stories call for reflexivity within psychiatry—they call clinicians to reconsider the culture of medicine and their potential projection of societal norms and desires upon patients. In unearthing multiple logics they use and perform in crafting narratives, treatise, essays, and diatribes of resistance, we can begin to understand these authors' struggle to

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[233] Rebecca J. Hester, "Protest Psychosis," (response to paper, Institute for the Medical Humanities 15th Annual Student Research Colloquium, Galveston, TX, June 6, 2014), 1-3; Stuart Kirk and Herb Kutchins, *Making Us Crazy,* 200-237.

[234] Gerald Grob, *Mad Among Us,* 279-310.

[235] Phil Brown and Stephen Zavestoski, *Social Movements in Health* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 4.

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humanize those who have suffered the stigmatization of mental illness, recognize the very material effects of their mental suffering, envision how mental health care can be reconceptualized and practiced in a way that is respectful of those who seek help, and acknowledge the effects of imposing biomedical epistemologies on those perhaps most attune to the pathology of this mad, mad world.

## Beyond Resistance

In short, to move beyond narratives of psychiatric resistance and beyond the progress narrative of biomedicine, we must continue to queer madness, acknowledge the danger of reifying strict dualities between biomedical and alternative treatments, and nurture offshoots that draw from a number of epistemologies and ontologies. This chapter was not intended to show how Deleuze and Guatarri's theory on rhizomes is fully embodied in psychiatric narratives of resistance (see Conclusion), but to suggest how a schizoanalysis of such stories may help contextualize TIP as an offshoot from a dense web of critiques against the totalizing biomedicalization of the body. This chapter seeks to build a space for further discussion on what it means to trust that other people within radical mental health communities are rooting themselves within particular narratives and histories and cultivating fertile ground for a heteroglossia of mental states to flourish. As I continue to explore the relationship between language (including identity politics, narratives, and histories) and truth within rhizomatic approaches to grappling with diverse mental states, TIP thus offers a space to think more about the politics of recognition, power dynamics within ostensibly non-hierarchical structures, and creative expression as a restorative patois.

The next two chapters will detail my interpersonal engagements within TIP. Although my research questions going into this undertaking were never exactly as elementary as—"Does it work? Or, can they adequately support someone in crisis?," I found myself becoming suspect of the artwork and prose found amongst their ragtag,

punk literature and seeking more than the beautiful idea(l)s they present so well on paper. I wondered about the real messiness of the lived experience of those trying to navigate the space between brilliance and madness; and as my focus shifted away from textual analysis of published narratives to personal interactions and informal writings created by those who contribute to TIP, I soon discovered many instabilities, fractures, and dissolutions within the organization's ecology.

## Chapter 4: Technical Junctures, a Search for Safe Spaces, and the Paradox of Resilience: A Study of The Icarus Project's Organizational History

To understand how contributors interact with TIP, we must first examine the manner in which the organization used and evolved with the technology at hand. My intent in this chapter is not to capture the complete histories of key contributors to TIP or to tell the organization's "untold story" (as that would be an impossible and fairly unhelpful endeavor). Rather, I aim to tease out relationships amongst technology, self, and emotional ecologies through which people live their lives. Technical junctures and ruptures that TIP experienced serve as mirrors for larger organizational shifts over the years; and in tracing the formation of the website, forums, Facebook groups, and publications, I began to understand the ways in which this organization has struggled to cultivate safe spaces within its emotional ecology, even as technical maintenance of digital spaces and other mundane aspects of behind-the-scenes administrative work took great time and effort away from pressing concerns in deciphering leadership structure, attaining financial support, and attending to the needs of its contributors.

Articulating the parallels in structure between online and offline formations of the group, a former staff member of TIP explains,

> One of the reasons building a website is so hard is that it requires people to formalize processes that were ambiguous or unclear prior. You have to define a whole lot of shit you could get away with not defining prior—a monumental task, you have to go back and reevaluate your mission, your organizational structure, who is allowed to do what and how it is done. It's more than just a pretty picture. It's all politics. It's the ossification or the embodiment of an organization.[236]

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[236] Jonah Bossewitch, Skype conversation with author, April 5, 2014.

Piecing together the history of technological use thus illuminates larger political struggles of representation: Who codes? Who moderates digital and analog spaces? Who decides aesthetic choices about the website? How are ideas about leading local groups communicated? What overt and subliminal messages are transmitted? And since technology and space are not innocent in the ways they give each other form, how can scaffoldings be created without reifying problematic conceptions of rationality and subjectivity? What kind of technology—if any—should manage or control?

What is more, TIP's organizational history is an intricate web of intensities and plateaus, lines of flight and crystalizations. Founded by two self-proclaimed "privileged, creative, educated white kids" in 2002, the community has been associated with a primarily white, anarcho-punk demographic.[237] Despite the founders' mistrust of capitalism, they found that the organization waxed with the influx of donations and waned with its lack, alongside the deterioration of their own mental states. Now, however, as the organization as a whole matures and seeks to find greater financial and structural stability, it also seeks to adhere more closely to traditional (neoliberal) models of nonprofit management for defining its membership base and moderating the kind of environments its membership create. Thus, TIP staff, after years of grappling with its leadership structure, recently began efforts to solidify roles within the organization, enforce accountability for on their online spaces and local chapters across the US, and foster anti-oppressive spaces for historically marginalized populations.

In this chapter, I trace the organization's varied approaches to structure, mission, and vision over time alongside calls for transparency, accountability, sustainability, and diversity. Namely, I seek to demonstrate that TIP, as an embodied project, is not innocent—its contributors are not "untouched" by the technology they attempt to harness.

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[237] Ashley "Jacks" McNamara, "Postscript and Reintroduction to the 5th Printing," in *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness: A Reader and Roadmap of Bipolar Worlds*, 10th ed. (Oakland, CA: The Icarus Project, 2013), 82.

The tension they feel within the project is an attempt to grapple with the nature of an emotional ecology as a deeply affective space. As such, they struggle with how to embrace diverse mental states, while still yearning for some separation, some "professional" distance from one another—they seek to connect with others as "peers," but to regulate aspects of that connection. As issues of gender, race, class, and other forms of privilege remain integral to understanding TIP's organizational history, this chapter discusses the role of technology in perpetuating oppressive spaces, while—in other instances—creating emotional ecologies in which people can connect. I argue that recent organizational shifts towards sustainable development and the rhetoric of resilience may play a paradoxical role in perpetuating—as well as resisting—neoliberal imperatives to mitigate "inevitable" catastrophe. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the many ruptures and lines of flight its membership have taken away from the organization over the years and consider what their loss may mean within the attempt to be mad together. In a community which has grown in leaps and bounds, just as it has lost others, it is important to deconstruct TIP's instability and discuss the challenges to maintaining a supportive space for those in crisis and for those who try to keep the organization afloat.

## Organizational Dynamism

### BIPOLAR BEGINNINGS, 2002-2008

The origin story of TIP goes something like this: On September 18, 2002, Sascha DuBrul published an article entitled "Bipolar Worlds" in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*; and Jacks McNamara happened to read the article and responded to his story by e-mailing him about similar experiences in grappling with a bipolar diagnosis.[238] The

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[238] Yael Chanoff, "Still Soaring," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, September 11, 2012, accessed February 13, 2015. http://www.sfbg.com/2012/09/11/still-soaring.

following month, DuBrul shared with Jacks the dozens of e-mails he had received from those who shared their difficulties in coping with the same diagnosis, and together they planned a way to share these stories and form a community of those disenchanted with the limits of medical terminology in describing their highs and lows.

Leadership structures and the scaffolding for building a website and forums evolved rather amorphously over time as the organization received small grants and other sources of funding to continue construction. On the forums, Jacks describes the rather impromptu manner in which TIP originated and grew over time,

> Basically, when we started TIP, we didn't have a constituency or a community—we just had a handful of e-mails from strangers and a sense that if we provided a space, a lot of like-minded people might show up. So we didn't start a collective. We made a de-centralized, empty cyber structure waiting for people to come use it. We had no intention of ever being employed by this thing or having it become a huge phenomenon. We just wanted to make a framework for conversation 'cause it seemed obvious that framework should exist.[239]

Both founders McNamara, an artist, and DuBrul, a community organizer, had other sources of employment and continued working on TIP on the side. However, DuBrul credits his mother Anita Altman, who he describes as a "high-powered fundraiser" with personal connections in New York City, for garnering private support for the organization.[240] Through connections with his mother's friends, DuBrul had help setting up TIP under an umbrella nonprofit organization Fund for the Jewish Community, which

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[239] Ashley "Jacks" McNamara, "Re: A SPECTER IS HAUNTING ICARUS- THE SPECTER OF ANARCHY!," January 24, 2005, accessed February 15, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=1710&p=8315#p8315.

[240] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "History of the Icarus Project Organizational Structure/Chaos," January 25, 2008, accessed February 21, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=10989.

allowed them to receive tax-deductible donations without incorporating as their own nonprofit.[241]

In the spring of 2003, with financial support from Anita Altman's friends, McNamara and DuBrul launched a website and an online forum (See Figure 21). The growth of their organization was incredibly timely. Web 2.0—arguably defined as a paradigm shift online towards more personal, social networks—was in its nascence; and information about critical perspectives toward psychiatry was not readily available.[242] It was only through e-mails from supporters, touring across the United States, meeting people with similar experience as them, and contributing to TIP's online forum that DuBrul and McNamara learned about more c/s/x movements and its deep roots in patient advocacy and activism.[243]

A year later, as the website swelled to a thousand users, Barbara Dobkin, a wealthy parent of a child diagnosed with bipolar disorder, provided funding for McNamara and DuBrul to quit their jobs for a few months and work on publishing a zine.[244] And in the winter of 2004, they compiled stories from the nascent Icarus community through material gathered on the online forums, letters, articles, and journals. In March 2004, they finished the editing process and published *Navigating the Space between Brilliance and Madness: A Reader & Roadmap of Bipolar Worlds*. Soon after, they embarked on a book tour and conducted workshops across the United States, with remaining funds from the donor.

McNamara learned HTML and CSS coding, along with help from their partner Ryan Johnson at the time, and together they developed and designed the website using

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[241] Ibid.

[242] Teresa M. Harrison and Brea Barthel, "Wielding New Media in Web 2.0: Exploring the History of Engagement with the Collaborative Construction of Media Products," *New Media & Society* 11 (February/March 2009): 155-178.

[243] Timothy Kelly, Skype conversation with author, July 5, 2014.

[244] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "History of the Icarus Project."

Johnson's private, custom proprietary code. May First hosted the website for a $200

monthly fee and offered some technical support for the organization. By 2004, however,

the website suffered from bit-rot and inoperable software, requiring professional

expertise that was no longer available. Meanwhile, Icarus contributor Linda42 organized

the forum on a commonly-used coding system (phpBB), which became a lifeline for

people to interact (while the website was largely inoperable) and a hub in its own right

for mutual support, information sharing, and discussion on local organizing, as local

groups began to meet in person.

McNamara acknowledges the many difficulties with communication and

consensus-building that they encountered from the very outset of this endeavor.

Responding to critiques regarding the leadership and direction of TIP in early 2005, they

write,

> Our anarchic little community has no central geographic location, isn't the most
> mentally stable (by definition), and is a little hard to organize into reliable units.
> It's not at all impossible—we're just young and learning how to walk as we go,
> and aren't sure of the best way to start spreading tasks and decision-making
> around. Speaking for myself, I find it really really hard to spread tasks out around
> bunches of people who are all over the continent and all over the globe and
> actually check in frequently enough, make sure people's questions are answered,
> make sure timelines are being stuck to on both ends, etc.[245]

Although McNamara and DuBrul were open to suggestions and comments for improving

the organization and moderating the forums, they found it challenging to learn how to

allocate responsibilities and gather feedback in a timely, productive manner.

Still, their commitment towards collaborative practices and radical social

organizing is evident in their technological choices for hosting, coding, and

communicating information about TIP. Jonah Bossewitch, an Icarus volunteer and web

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[245] Ashley "Jacks" McNamara, "Re: A SPECTER IS HAUNTING."

developer from 2004-2015, worked with Will Hall to migrate the propriety site to Drupal4 in 2006 (See Figure 24).[246] Bossewitch describes an ethos of teamwork and cooperation within the development of TIP's digital spaces; and in his forthcoming dissertation chapter on the organization, he explains the decision behind using socially radical communication systems within its development as a website and a forum,

> From the outset, Icarus aligned itself with radical technology collectives, such as the Riseup.net collective and the May First/People Link. Unlike traditional hosting vendors, these organizations were devoted to social justice and independent media, and support a range of progressive activist organizations. These technical collectives managed the project's servers and mailing lists, providing secure hosting services that were organized like a cooperative instead of a corporation. These organizations strongly advocated for the use of free and libre open-source software (FOSS) based on their deep understanding of how these tools embodied the values of the causes they supported . . . TIP has recognized this deep ideological compatibility with free culture, and embraced FOSS tools and Creative Commons licensing at almost every turn. Although their original public-facing website was a custom proprietary implementation, the community forum was implemented using phpBB, a popular open source bulletin board system with flexible configuration that supported delegated moderation and pseudo-anonymous registration.[247]

However, the aims behind collaborative, open source building blocks for digital spaces fell short of their goals for sustainable development; and despite many attempts at coding in accessible programming languages, the website and the forums have been a source of instability since their inception.

Through Anita Altman's connections in the New York philanthropic community, TIP received an invitation to submit a proposal to The Ittleson Foundation, an

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[246] Will Hall, "Website Upgrade! (forum staying the same)," November 17, 2006, accessed February 21, 2015.
http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=7209&p=44463&hilit=drupal#p44463.

[247] Jonah Bossewitch, "Dangerous Gifts."

organization that provides funds for novel programs and model ventures;[248] and in October 2004, McNamara wrote a grant application to them to work with Fountain House, a well-respected organization established in the 1940s for those with encounters in psychiatric systems. [249] Based in Manhattan, Fountain House provided TIP with office space and other administrative support to provide college-age students with resources to create peer-based mental health support groups. From 2005 through 2006, The Ittleson Foundation provided TIP with $80,000 through a matching funds grant; and with this revenue, they were able to start Campus Icarus chapters in the New York City area and publish *Friends Make the Best Medicine: A Guide to Creating Community Mental Health Support Networks*, which provided a loose framework for student leaders and other activists interested in forming Icarus support groups in their area.[250] Modeled after the anarchist organization Food Not Bombs, Icarus Project chapters were initially conceptualized as being largely autonomous entities, whose "formula" for community organizing and mad activism could be loosely replicated across the country.[251]

With this funding source, Sascha and Jacks then opened up TIP to an infusion of new leadership; and with the help of Madigan Shive, they formed the Owl Collective in August 2005, which included a handful of staff people and volunteers.[252] An official

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[248] The Ittleson Foundation, "About Us," accessed May 9, 2015. http://www.ittlesonfoundation.org/about-the-foundation/.

[249] The Fountain House, "Who We Are," accessed May 9, 2015. http://www.fountainhouse.org/about.

[250] Throughout the process of compiling information for publication and editing, zine contributors utilized online forums to solicit comment and feedback as prior to the publication's release. See The Icarus Project, "Friends Make The Best Medicine First Edition Feedback + Notes," May 11, 2009, accessed February 13, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/wiki/friendsmakebestmedicinefirsteditionfeedbacknotes.

[251] Daniela Capistrano, "Why The Icarus Project Needs to Decolonize."

[252] Over the years, the organization as a whole also opened up the community to those with mental illness diagnoses—in addition to those with bipolar disorder—who shared similar critiques on the limitations of biopsychiatry in addressing their lived experiences.

report to The Ittleson Foundation after the first year of their funding describes the emerging leadership structure,

> Over the course of this year, the leadership of TIP has expanded to include four part-time, salaried members of what has become known as the National Icarus Project Organizing Collective, which is responsible for providing direction, management of the organization and its finances. In addition to founding member Sascha DuBrul, the newly formed collective includes: Madigan Shive, Will Hall, and Carey Lamprecht, each of whom brings to this work years of community organizing experience in the mental health field. Founding member Ashley McNamara has stepped down from the position of director to serve as a consultant to the evolving organization. This shift and expansion has allowed us to redistribute the growing workload of this dynamic organization in a way that models the kind of support and horizontal decision-making that we hope to foster in regional Icarus groups nationwide, while also preventing burn-out in the founding members.[253]

The intent for horizontal decision-making remained a core principle of the national organization for a long time, as it did in web development as well. However, on both fronts, Icarus staff with a longer history with the organization, access to funding sources, and representation as spokesmen in the larger community made it difficult—at times—to make truly collaborative, non-hierarchical decisions within the organization.

The website became another space in which horizon power structures were a challenge to enact. During this time, McNamara and their partner Ryan Johnson had updated the website to a newer version, but with McNamara's stepping down from TIP, the website soon needed greater support than they could provide. On November 17, 2006, web designers Will Hall, Jonah Bossewich, and Edgard Durand made public the switch from the proprietary website to Drupal4, an open source content management platform that provides the scaffolding and framework for many nonprofit organizations. These

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[253] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "History of the Icarus Project."

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developers had worked on this shift since 2004;[254] and with the Drupal website now

hosted on May First, other Icarus volunteers could more readily code, update and modify

aspects of the website, and teach others to do likewise.[255]

The initial goals of the Drupal website were documented in a report to the Ittleson

Foundation at the close of 2006,

> The new website platform has significantly opened-out the development and
> planning of TIP. We now have more than half a dozen volunteers regularly
> involved with discussion and planning of Icarus' future, participating from around
> the country. Questions of how to realize Icarus' goals and administer our
> objectives are brought to a broader group, opening the way for greater
> involvement of more people in the future. We successfully integrated other online
> tools such as the Open Plans website to enhance our organizational transparency,
> expanding the circle of accountability for our local group organizers and other
> stakeholders. This greater transparency directly models the Icarus collaborative
> and mutual-aid values we are cultivating with the support groups: we are
> dispensing with a traditional two-tiered, broadcast model of knowledge in favor of
> a collaborative, horizontal popular education model backed by the most powerful
> software tools now available.[256]

For a time, these software tools enabled some Icarus contributors to blog on the national

website and post journal articles, blogs, and other media. Yet as other, less reliable web

developers took over, the vision the founders had for a two-way social media website—in

which Icarus contributors could download Icarus material and upload their own

writings—largely fell to the wayside.[257] Regarding the shift to Drupal, Bossewith

remarks, "The intent with Drupal at the time had been to create a community site, and

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[254] Sascha Altman DuBrul's Facebook Page, accessed November 30, 2014,
https://www.facebook.com/sascha.dubrul.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), History of the Icarus Project.

[257] These user-generated content is not currently accessible on TIP's updated 2015
website.

this initial effort was supposed to be about laying a foundation—a foundation that was never fully realized."[258]

Meanwhile, Icarus staff struggled to keep the organization together. Many staff members were scattered across the country, and the physical office space TIP had at Fountain House in Manhattan went largely unused. In November 2006, the organization put out a call for a part-time staff person to serve as both an office manager and staff/volunteer coordinator. The hires that year and the next—Alicia Ohs and Mimi LaValley respectively—had quick turnover rates; and by the beginning of 2008, the organization began to lose direction.[259] Writing on the forums during a time of upheaval, DuBrul explains the paradoxical effect of the grandiose belief that they could change the "System" alongside the reality that many of those initially involved did not have a strong background in operating in professional settings,

> a reoccurring theme throughout TIP history, at least for me, is this 'bipolar-like' feeling of being this incredibly inspiring badass radical organization that's taking on the mainstream medical system and creating models of very radical viable alternatives that are capturing the imaginations of thousands....and then just being a bunch of irresponsible wingnuterista kids who don't know what the fuck we're doing and are verging on total crash and burn collapse. but that could just be my head trip. yeah, actually, i'm pretty sure that's my head trip [sic].[260]

In addition, the fear of creating structures that might mirror the totalitarian institutions that they fought against—that of the state and of medicine—made them wary of accountability practices that often seemed like overly bureaucratized processes based on contracts and liability, rather than friendship, relationships, and self-expression. Jacks

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[258] Sascha Altman DuBrul's Facebook Page.

[259] Despite ongoing organizational challenges, The Icarus Project and the Freedom Center collaborated on *A Harm Reduction Guide to Coming Off Psychiatric Drugs*, written by Will Hall, an Icarus web developer. The zine was published in September 2007.

[260] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "History of the Icarus Project."

McNamara, discussing the organization's ideological tensions with such structure, writes, "I am amazed by the lack of attention we paid to the formative influences of childhood, family, environment, trauma, spiritual crisis, addiction, race, class, and privilege. I am struck by our adamant independence, our deep mistrust of authority, and our fear of our own insanity."[261] TIP's effort to harness their own "dangerous gifts" was one that was not always won, and in the shared "fear of our own insanity," the push towards protocol to shore up the organization from their own periods of instability was often placed in opposition to the maddening aspects of institutional "order" and "progress."

## WOMEN'S ENCUENTRO & DECENTRALIZATION, 2008-2011

Later I will argue that the potential for—and the reality—of a "total crash and burn collapse" are what make TIP a radical, dangerous endeavor in itself. For now, though, it will suffice to say that I found it rather difficult to learn about the events surrounding the national organization's temporary dissolution of leadership from 2008 through 2011. Many renderings of this time mention the loss of funding, staff burnout, internal disputes, abuses of power, and other challenging interpersonal dynamics. Still, while TIP lacked formal representation, the organization's dispersion brought with it possibility of reformation in the future.

Alex Samets, one of the original participants within the national collective, wrote the following critique of power dynamics within TIP during this time of transition,

> In the early part of 2008, a group of women that participated in TIP gathered to talk about the pattern of sexism in our organization, both as it related to specific individuals and to the organization's larger culture. One of the themes the women in these meetings discussed was that of dominant narrative.
>
> In our society, the narrative of the collective is almost always sublimated to the narrative of the individual, and the narrative of women is too often sublimated to

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261 Ashley "Jacks" McNamara, "Postscript," 82.

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the narrative of men. This pattern of story-making has been replicated in the work of TIP throughout our life, just as it has been visible in so many movements throughout time.

There are many powerful things about narrative, and one of them is that narratives create our realities. A dominant narrative of individual masculine creation and success has the effect of silencing women throughout the world. It took coming to a point of grave desperation in TIP to publicly acknowledge this process of revising and silencing, and to work to transform it into a process of re-visioning and space-making.[262]

The Women's Encuentro, a series of conference call meetings conducted at the beginning of 2008, sought to acknowledge power imbalance within the national organization, air grievances regarding unfair treatment between staff members and volunteers, and make short-term recommendations for addressing issues of leadership and representation in the national organization.[263] Led by Madigan Shive, these conversations also aimed to recognize the many contributions women volunteers and staff had made to the organization throughout the years and to broaden the base of decision-makers to support more consensus-based leadership initiatives. Wanting to move away from the constraints of what they perceived to be a top-down leadership structure, these women discussed a network model of organizing that would allow for thoughtful vision of shared goals to emerge within supportive relationships. In this way, community building, skill-sharing, and other forms of support could be achieved within a less frantic timeframe and without the impositions and expectations of granting foundation.

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[262] Alex Samets, "Struggle in Movement: The Icarus Project and Radical Organizing for Many Realities," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 6 (2008): 1-4, https://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/struggle-in-movement/, accessed February 14, 2015.

[263] The Icarus Project, "Spring is Here!," April 21, 2009, accessed February 26, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/icarusorganizational/springhere.

Women also perceived that the gendered power dynamics between the staff and volunteers also contributed to lack of accountability in the organization. To this effect, one Encuentro participant states,

> In general, a huge issue that i have with tip is that there is no formal built-in accountability generated from outside sources when projects are planned. Which I think is part of why the pattern of deeply problematic power (sharing) dynamics was allowed to continue relatively unchecked, because checks of power only came from other internal staff, who are all caught up emotionally and socially and sometimes romantically with each other.[264]

Here, the dynamics of wanting to remain untouched by technology—desiring some separation within an environment imbued with emotions and other diverse mental states—becomes apparent. Yet, when the technology allows for people to draw close to each other, to enter into each others' lifeworlds in a profound way, it remains in question as to who has the right to check another person's actions or form an accountability structure and how that might even be possible (given the vision to embrace internal differences and diverse ontologies).

In a memoir, DuBrul describes painful personal criticism he received "about how my past intimate relationships with women had undermined the power dynamics in the organization" and that "I was told by people I loved that my actions made them feel like 'glorified secretaries.'"[265] Of this time, DuBrul writes,

> I dealt with the criticism in my old faithful way, to step back and write about what was happening—to be a mythic character in a story in my mind. But I was being criticized for taking up too much space with my story—for eclipsing other's stories. Amidst it all I short-circuited. Instead of being present with the criticisms—sitting with the pain of it and growing in new ways, I kept

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[264] The Icarus Project, "Feedback from the Women's Encuentro," January 7, 2009, accessed February 27, 2015.
http://www.theicarusproject.net/wiki/feedbackwomensencuentro.

[265] Sascha Altman Dubrul, *Maps to the Other Side*, 151.

unconsciously trying to make myself the center of an adventure story—a crucified martyr in a way that wasn't appropriate at all.[266]

Searching for new narratives to tell about his life, time for reflection, and recovery from a hospitalization at Bellevue Hospital's psychiatric ward, DuBrul chose to spend a year living and working at a yoga ashram in the Bahamas and took a several year hiatus from leading the organization.[267]

To redress perceived power imbalances, women who participated in the Encuentro provided the following recommendations to improve group dynamics:

> We recommend the transition from the current power holders to a more expansive collective structure being guided by a Transition Team comprised of individuals who resonate with the goals of TIP. We would like to see this Transition Team include only people who are self-selected rather than people who have been invited. These folks need to reflect diverse voices that have been overlooked in the past.[268]

Framed as a move towards grassroots organizing and membership empowerment, the Encuentro envisioned the creation of a transitional team who would receive some funding to begin restructuring the organization, ensure the completion of projects funded by grantors, moderate the forums, and take over daily operation.

Respecting the Encuentro's recommendations, TIP's central leadership (the Owl Collective) provided the transitional team support before disbanding or remaining in the periphery in an advisory role. During the spring of 2008, the transitional team created the National Coordinator Collective (a.k.a. the Intergalactic Coordinator Collective) tasked with redistributing tasks from existing positions and bringing new Icarus contributors into

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266 Ibid.

267 When he returned the next year, he served TIP for two years in an advisory role for a diffuse group of organizers who took over after many members of the Owl Collective stepped down from their positions.

268 The Icarus Project, "Feedback from the Women's Encuentro."

leadership positions.[269] Angel Adeyoha and Annie Robinson took on primary roles in education and outreach on college campuses, and Mimi LaValley, Nick Bosman, Will Hall, Madigan Shive, and Molly Sprengelmeyer served as volunteer coordinators of working groups in administration, website development, media and publications, and staff support.[270]

On the adversities of organizing, the Coordinator Collective poetically explains their struggles and successes in trying a different form of leadership style,

> Our style of mad organizing can also be challenging: when we shoot for the moon we sometimes end up in flames on the launch pad. The wild successes are truly stunning, and when things don't work out quite right it still all feels worth it. Depressed and painful are mixed in with the exciting and joyful, as we live this project as fully and as deeply as we live our lives.[271]

Despite a dearth of funding, the coordinating collective sent out bi-yearly newsletters to its users, updating them about the new decentralized working groups, funding allocation, fundraising efforts, media attention, website development, local group events, and campus outreach. TIP's office space under the auspices of the Fountain House relocated to downtown Manhattan at the headquarters of the War Resisters League. The Coordinator Collective also sent out financial reports to its contributors and solicited funding from its membership.[272]

A financial report from August 2010 reveals that TIP was operating on less than $15,000 that year.[273] Part-time staff members would receive between $300-500 for their

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[269] The Icarus Project, "Fall Update 2008," September 4, 2008, accessed February 26, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/%5Bcatpath%5D/icarus-fall-update-2008.

[270] Ibid.

[271] The Icarus Project, "Fall Update 2008."

[272] The Icarus Project, "Finances," September 17, 2008, accessed February 26, 2015. http://www.coactivate.org/projects/icarusproject/finances.

[273] The Icarus Project, "Financial Reports," August 2010, accessed February 26, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/financialtransparency.

work doing website maintenance, local group outreach, media and publications, and other administrative tasks. Membership drives brought in some funding as did a fundraiser in New York, but as a contributor to the Coordinator Collective remarked, the pay provided was not close to a living wage and collective staff members had to find other part-time jobs to remain a part of the leadership. By the beginning of 2011, the bank account had only $3,000; and the Collective was struggling to find fundraising opportunities. [274]

## WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT AND THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

During TIP's National Coordinator Collective period (2008-2011), Icarus web designer silverelf continued daily maintenance of the website and forums. In a private message to me, he wrote, "I stayed on as a sort of general fix-all-the-things person for a long time. I answered e-mails, resent passwords, fixed bugs, tried to stay on top of efforts to figure out what a new organizing collective would look like, etc."[275] TIP's Spring 2010 newsletter invites comments from membership on improvements to the website and provides the following vision for its development as a space for two-way communication:

> We're launching an ambitious project to redesign our website to make it more user-friendly, expand its possibilities for social networking use, make it more accessible to people using assistive technologies, and in general make it a better place to get and share information, organize projects and events, connect with local groups, etc. Our vision is a more member-driven community where many people are regularly writing articles, submitting art, organizing protests, finding friends, receiving support, sharing curriculum, etc.[276]

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[274] The Icarus Project, "2011 January 26th Call Notes," January 26, 2011, accessed February 27, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/wiki/2011-january-26th-call-notes.

[275] silverelf, private message to the author, January 27, 2014.

[276] The Icarus Project, "Spring Newsletter," March 22, 2010, accessed February 27, 2015, http://www.theicarusproject.net/spring-newsletter.

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Such efforts along with conversations amongst other "radical techies" in New York City
to code "better development environments, a codebase that anyone could contribute to,"
never manifested in redesigning the website.

Still, silverelf was able to actualize some key digital improvements in TIP's
trajectory. In 2010, he—with the help of other Icarus coders—combined the login
between the Icarus website (coded in Drupal) and the forums (coded in phpBB), thus
syncing them for easier access to both spaces (See Figure 22). And along with Nick
Bosman, a fellow Icarus developer, he upgraded the website from Drupal 5, and later
participated in the website's upgrade in 2013 to a newer version Drupal 6.[277]

Vast shifts in the community began a couple years before the organization's
leaderless period include the rise of social media. In 2005, DuBrul put out feelers on the
forums seeking advice from those who had tried out Myspace to ascertain the networking
power the burgeoning field of social media. Despite intense discussions of selling out to
"mainstream monoculture" and the evils of aligning themselves with the likes of Rupert
Murdoch (the CEO of Myspace), the potential to gain more followers and traction within
greater networks won out, and soon local Icarus groups began organizing on Myspace.[278]
"Icarus Project Loves You," the national organization's official Myspace page, was
created in 2006.[279] As more Icarus contributors started visiting the site to organize local
group meetings and participate in other digital communities, the advent of Myspace lead
to a great exodus from the forums, as Icarus membership gravitated towards social
interactions on one space, where they could also stay in touch with friends and family

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[277] Facebook, Inc., "Sascha Altman DuBrul's Facebook Page."

[278] Katherine Rushton, "Murdoch Sale led to Rune of MySpace, Says Its Co-
Founder," The Telegraph, November 17, 2013, accessed March 28, 2015.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/digital-
media/10455975/Murdoch-sale-led-to-ruin-of-MySpace-says-its-co-founder.html.

[279] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "Open Dialogue," February 23, 2005, accessed
March 28, 2015.
http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=1918&p=9401.

outside of TIP.[280] Nevertheless, corporate aspects of Myspace set some Icarus anarchists

on edge, as they responded negatively to advertisements on the site. The tension is made

evident by Icarus Project Loves You Myspace 2007 tagline, "I'm not hanging out in this

corporate ad trap anymore, you can find me at: http://theicarusproject.net."[281]

Only by talking with DuBrul did I even learn about TIP's presence on Myspace.

Having missed the Myspace wave as a teenager, I created my first Myspace account in

March 2015, almost a decade after its heyday.[282] I "connected" with DuBrul, along with

Icarus Project Seattle and Bonfire Madigan (a former National Organizing Collective

member). I could not find any other Icarus local groups still on the site; and Icarus

Project Loves You Myspace page reads as a virtual wasteland. I was the 714th

"connection" to the page, which once held a plethora of status updates, links to articles

and blogs, and other posts. In 2013, Justin Timberlake bought Myspace and redesigned

the site to promote musicians and other artists, a renovation which resulted in a huge data

loss from pages created before the shift.[283] Icarus Project Loves You now has just 16

photos posted on the site—the only remainders of what was once a flourishing digital

commons.[284]

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[280] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "Getting Icarus Off Facebook (a thread of strategy," August 3, 2014, accessed May 5, 2015, http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=35575&p=308824.

[281] Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "Myspace Monocult or Icarus Rebel Alliance or…," March 22, 2007, accessed March 27, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=8642.

[282] "Erica Fletcher's MySpace page," *MySpace.com*, accessed May 5, 2015, https://myspace.com/erica.fletcher.

[283] Cynthia Boris, "MySpace Deletes Your Stuff," *Marketing Pilgrim*, June 13, 2013, accessed March 27, 2015, http://www.marketingpilgrim.com/2013/06/myspace-deletes-your-stuff.html.

[284] The Icarus Project, "Photos," https://myspace.com/icarusproject/photos, accessed March 28, 2015.

Similar debates about the evils of corporate advertisements versus the popularity of the social media tools continued as TIP launched a Facebook group in 2007,[285] a Twitter account in January 2010, and a public Icarus Facebook page in 2011. Tagging me in his Facebook post regarding the group's technological history, DuBrul writes, "a large majority of the users of the 'icarus forums' switched to using social networking sites (or at least stopped using the forums as our moderation waned) and our population started to grow on facebook, which is now where the majority of our popular communication is happening."[286] With the decline in forum users and over four thousand members on the Facebook group (as of February 2015), Facebook hosts the vast majority of conversations occurring within the Icarus community.

Despite the instability of social media and challenges to archiving the wealth of information produced on those spaces, social media has also helped TIP remain relevant to large audiences and furthered the quantity of those networked to the organization, even though some would argue that the quality of such conversations has diminished significantly. Still, in the last couple months, I have been able to connect (albeit briefly) with Icarus organizers as far away as Spain and France through Facebook, the forums, and e-mail; and while I can understand the sense of loss many long term participants in TIP feel in the move away from the forums, it seems unlikely that they will ever regain their status as the epicenter of Icarus organizing.

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285 The Icarus Project, "Facebook," accessed March 26, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=79&t=8971&p=60330; The Icarus Project, "Myspace Monocult."

286 Scatter (Sascha Altman DuBrul), "Re: FB, Mad in America & Icarus Community Survey?," accessed March 27, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=84&t=33176&start=40#p283482.

For the purposes of this rendering of TIP's history, I will gesture to the Occupy

Movement as a period, which catalyzed radicals across the country.[287] Occupy Wall

Street served as a touchstone for revitalizing TIP, both in New York and across radical

communities in the United States, as mental health activists aired their grievances with

the politico-economic failings of large corporations—such as Big Pharma—and their

entanglements within governmental action. Bossewitch, who conducted fieldwork for his

dissertation at Occupy Wall Street in New York City, details some of his encounters with

fellow Occupy activists and volunteers in a chapter in his dissertation.[288] In Zucotti Park,

volunteers with radical perspectives on mental states participated alongside traditional

mental health care workers in the Safety Cluster and Support group throughout the course

of several weeks. Of this time, Maryse Mitchell-Brody, a therapist who was involved in

organizing with and writing about TIP, describes her involvement with the Support group

during Occupy,

> Our "Support" working group, as we called it, was made up of social workers,
> counselors, psychiatrists, and peer supporters. We came from a big range of
> political approaches, especially when it came to mental health. Some folks were
> completely convinced of the evils of global capital but very comfortable with
> pathologizing people as "mentally ill." Our meetings were epic and often involved
> a lot of hard dialogue between Icarus folks and more conventional mental health
> practitioners…I mourn that some people were triggered by the presence and
> approach of a group I helped organize. In the face of so much fear – about all of
> the bad things that could happen – a few folks fell back on some oppressive
> language and wielded the power of their degrees to oppress those who didn't. We
> also worked (and at times failed) to reckon with and be accountable around our
> whiteness, and the ways in which white social workers and psychiatrists oppress
> people of color. We, like so many other groups, like Icarus, struggled to know

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[287] As previously discussed, Occupy Wall Street was also a touchstone for the
Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective's formation, as local activists met to discuss
issues linking individual mental states to greater politico-economic forces.

[288] Jonah Bossewitch, "Dangerous Gifts."

how to build this new mechanism of support in a world that has worked to undo our skills of truly libratory healing.[289]

In the months following the New York Police Department's eviction of Occupy protestors on November 15, 2011, Jonah Bossewitch and Sascha DuBrul—among many other Icarus-affiliated activists from The Freedom Center and MindFreedom International —were inspired to collaborate on the publication *Mindful Occupation: Rising Up without Burning Out*, a 'zine on navigating crisis situations, facilitating peer-to-peer support groups, and practicing self-care.[290]

**REINVENTING THE ICARUS PROJECT, 2012—2015**

In the spring and summer of 2012, the organization was able to fundraise over $40,000 through foundations and private donations. McNamara and DuBrul—along with web developers Jonah Bossewitch and silverelf—sought to make the organization's tenth anniversary as an "important jumping off point to connect with a wide and diverse variety of Icarus allies and former Icarus-affiliated people and begin to develop a base of people from which to develop a new and sustainable decision-making body for Icarus as an organization."[291] Recognizing the failings and fragility, DuBrul sought to approach the restructuring of the organization "in a way that wouldn't burn the people out who worked

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[289] Maryse Mitchell-Brody, "Balancing Acts: Building Accountable Communities of Care," October 3, 2012, accessed March 27, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/article/balancing-acts-building-accountable-communities-care.

[290] Like other Icarus-affiliated publications, this pamphlet is available through a Creative Commons license and PDF files of this publication are posted online free of charge. See Sascha Altman Dubrul, Maps to the Other Side, 177-182; Aki Imai, Becca Shaw Glaser, Eric Stiens, Jonah Bossewitch, M. Osborn, Rachel Liebert, Sarah Harper, and Sascha Altman DuBrul, *Mindful Occupation: Rising Up without Burning Out* (Richmond, VA: Occupy Mental Health Project, 2012).

[291] The Icarus Project, "A Gathering of Wings and Stories in the Darkness: The Icarus Project Reaches a Decade," May 30, 2013, accessed May 5, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/a-gathering-wings-and-stories.

for icarus, that was way more diverse culturally and racially in terms of who was working at icarus and who was being served (we started off as a group of all white people), and that would be much more accessible to a way larger percentage of the populations (we started off with a base of radical political activist and anarchist punks.)."[292] Leaders in the Icarus community restarted conversations about imagining an alternative leadership structure and creating an advisory board (similar to a board of members in a traditional nonprofit organization) of past Icarus staff members and among others involved in c/s/x movements who could serve as mentors.[293]

Updating the website became a priority once again, and Icarus staff hired a Drupal developer to streamline the website, which at this point had burgeoned out into a huge amount of unwieldy data. The website, which had long been the "face" of the organization, often lacked the attention, structure, and maintenance it needed to represent the community well. TIP hired a website developer to update the website to Drupal 8 and another designer to update the aesthetic of the website. Meanwhile, Agustina Vidal, an Icarus contributor since 2006 and a staff member since 2013, took on the arduous task of sorting through data to be tagged on the website during the summer of 2014—a task which proved even more difficult and potentially irrelevant when the main website developer left the job unexpectedly. DuBrul, agreeing with fellow Icarus contributors that further transparency and accountability in website development would be ideal, articulates some of the obstacles to the ad hoc approach they first took towards the website,

> there were like 13 databases that were created and taking up a ton of space but not doing anything except slowing the site down and making it harder to navigate. it's an incredibly labyrinth-like site that was obviously made by a bunch of different people that weren't talking to each other. there was all kinds of junk in there that

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[292] Facebook, Inc., "Sascha Altman DuBrul's Facebook Page."

[293] This goal for an advisory board was actualized in early 2015, alongside other attempts to create TIP protocol and infrastructure.

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had to be cleaned up and 1000s of articles that needed to be resorted and tagged or deleted, a whole old system of user profiles and journals…[294]

Because much of the web development was volunteer-based for so long and because of the web developers who they did hire were not able to rely on TIP as their primary source of income, the site functioned more like a collapsing structure that was built onto rather than reinvented entirely.

With the loss of a key back-end web-developer, a programming team in Brooklyn took over the reconstruction of the website in the Fall of 2014, and on February 9, 2015, the new website came online (See Figure 23). The website now has a clean modern appearance with sans serif type face and similar artwork to its predecessors on a white background. The site content has been organized, sorted, and tagged, and Icarus staff members have assured the community that documents can be searched.[295]

The new funding in 2012 also brought along new staff members. Faith Rhyne started helping McNamara and DuBrul as a volunteer in the fall of 2012. Eight months later, she took a paid position, after asking that forum moderators also get some form of

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[294] Facebook, Inc., "Sascha Altman DuBrul's Facebook Page."

[295] The Icarus Project, "The New Icarus Web Page," accessed February 24, 2015, http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=36552&p=321554. Note: In the course of beginning this chapter at the end of January before the switch to the new website, I assumed I would be able to browse through the archives as I had done many times before. However, when I click on hyperlinks from the new website's master list of archival files, now I am taken to a page stating, "There is currently no content classified with this term." When I click on certain pages, such as the Gallery page, the website takes me to a page with the words, "What are we gonna do about the Gallery?" This unanticipated inability to access the archives in the rather haphazard way I had previously—while well-illustrating the instability of digital spaces—also meant that I was not readily able to access some of the financial information, official reports sent to granting foundations, meeting minutes, and other documents to fact-check the information I had gathered from more informal sources. Eventually, I figured out that I could type in specific years into the Search function and that method enabled me to acquire some of the information that I was previously unable to access. See The Icarus Project, "Taxonomy," accessed February 24, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/taxonomy/term/9670.; The Icarus Project, "Galleries," accessed February 24, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/node/25273.

compensation for their work. (Of course, Faith also introduced me to current and former staff members and helped to contextualize my experiences working with them and learning more about TIP's changing organizational structure.) Regarding the challenges to establishing trusting relationships in the greater Icarus community and the Mad Movement, Rhyne says, "I understood that in that community, if I were to enter into that position in sort of a shady way, that clearly was the sort of half-assed, nontransparent kind of way that people end up in places of leadership, I guess the nepotism of it, that I would have no respect, and that I ultimately would not be able to do the work."[296] She started out taking meeting notes, synthesized information, responded to e-mail inquires about the national organization, and went on to take the part-time position of a local support group coordinator for Icarus chapters across the United States. In this role, she responded to inquiries into starting local groups and conducted bi-monthly support calls for local group organizers. As a participant in many of these calls, I listened in on discussions to troubleshoot issues that came up within Icarus meetings, share best practices for facilitation, talk about upcoming events, and provide mutual support.

The year 2014 brought a number of transitions within the Icarus staff. Early in the year, McNamara stepped down from TIP after twelve years of working on and off as staff and representative for the organization. In the summer, Cheyenna Weber joined the staff to serve in operation support and strategic development, and with her guidance, TIP gained more clearly defined job descriptions for new hires.[297] By the fall, Weber had posted a detailed job description for the position of a national organizer for local support and discussion groups; and the national organization started the process of reading through resumes and conducting interviews in October and November. During this time, while I was in Asheville, Faith Rhyne transitioned out of her role as part-time local

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[296] Faith Rhyne in discussion with the author, August 2014.

[297] The Icarus Project, "Icarus Staff," accessed February 24, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/article/icarus-staff.

support group coordinator and ended her formal affiliation with the organization as TIP began efforts to hire a full-time national organizer. By mid-December, current Icarus staff—Sascha DuBrul, Agustina Vidal, and Cheyenna Weber—offered the position to Daniela Capistrano and charged her with the task of decolonizing the organization from the inside out (See Figure 23). Together they committed to creating safe space and sustainable development within TIP.

## Searching for Safe Spaces

TIP's rich, varied history is a story of dynamism and experimentation over time, yet given recent modes of leadership, the national organization may be losing its faith that their members might be able to engage with the project without the imposition of very directed goals. With the intent of creating safe space, TIP has recently implemented measures to redirect energy to "center" people of color in its leadership and membership. This focus seeks for Icarus membership to feel comfortable sharing their experiences— regardless of race, class, sexual orientation, or gender—and for safety within the organization's operations, following critiques of unsafe and non-inclusive working environment in TIP's past. On a post on TIP's Facebook page, DuBrul reflects on the insidious ways that issues of racial inclusivity were not addressed in TIP's history,

> Frankly, our current organizing structure is so crippled by our white blinders. Me and the other white folks who started Icarus were centering ourselves and our particular life experiences when we initially started organizing, and that has made our organization very white and therefore very closed to most people, unable to engage and be relevant with larger social movements that are on the front lines of changing our broken systems. To change that, we need to re-center ourselves, which means centering the experiences of people of color while making space for everyone, and Daniela is leading that process right now.[298]

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[298] Facebook Inc., "Sascha Altman Dubrul's post on The Icarus Project's Facebook page."

A search for stability and sustainability continues as staff members transition out of their roles, and as leadership shifts to newer staff members. Yet as a new push towards diversity continues, it remains unclear how this goal can be achieved in thoughtful, culturally sensitive, and "safe" manner.

From a certain perspective, one might frame TIP as a story from chaotic beginnings towards gradual improvement—towards greater accountability, stronger leadership, grassroots empowerment, membership diversity and transparent growth. However, such a teleological narrative might gloss over the real struggles that persist within the organization's ebb and flow over the years, silence the multiplicity of goals and visions its contributors hold, and all-too-easily encapsulate its internal dynamics as leading to some ultimate end. Those overt visions of a more orderly organization— though earnest and well-intentioned—may come at the risk of stultifying and crystalizing the group in its attempts to become more sustainable. In pointing to TIP's spheres—from the forums, Facebook group, and local groups, I will first describe the particular cultures which have emerged on such spaces, then consider tensions between such cultures and the national organization's recent efforts to create safe space through recent decolonization practices. Moreover, I will argue that such practices might further delineate the limits of particular boundaries and identities, which may, in some ways, serve to silt efforts towards inclusivity.

## THE RHETORIC OF SAFE SPACE

Before analysis of the many places a push towards fostering safe space has been operationalized, I would first like to ask what underlies the desire for safe space? And what rhetorical and material ends does it serve? One way to understand the desire for safe space is through the lens of neoliberal encroachment. Through this lens of extending economic rationalities to new domains, a safe space can be seen as something that can be

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demarcated clearly, grasped objectively, and attained through purposeful moves to ban those who hold racist, sexist, elitist, homophobic, or sanist attitudes and by bringing in people who could be markers, that safe space has been created (i.e. historically marginalized people—including women, queer, and people of color).

As an extension of rationality of the market, the search for safe space can also indicate a desire for protection and control within an organization. Inherent within safety discourse are notions of risk and responsibility, in which individuals and communities are called to mitigate risk through defensive actions to ensure their survival against disaster and catastrophe. Articulating the pitfalls inherent within much of risk discourse, Brad Evans and Reid write,

> The ecological imaginary is colonizing the social and political imaginaries of theorists and practitioners of development in ways that are providing fertile ground for the application of neoliberalism as a solution to the problem of sustainability as catastrophically conceived. Understanding how that is possible requires understanding the biopolitcs of neoliberalism; how its claims to be able to increase wealth and freedom are correlated with ways to increase the prosperity and security of life itself.[299]

If we are to imagine TIP as an ecological landscape, the aim for safe space could be seen as territorialization, a mapping out of places to colonize under the guise of decolonization and increased freedom.

At first glance, this might be seen as a facile critique of an organization that is trying to right perceived wrongs from its past, especially when the need for alternative perspectives on mental states is so great. After many years of social and economic precarity, the desire for prosperity, diversity, and security within TIP is certainly understandable, yet I question the way TIP has been framed and operationalized what it would mean to achieve such goals. In grasping for safety and sustainability, I wonder

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[299] Brad Evans and Julian Reid, *Resilient Life,* 83.

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what freedoms and lines of flight might be stripped away from the organization's potentiality? How might demarcating safe space further entrench TIP in static notions of selfhood and identity? How might the call for sustainability curb the spaces for creativity and inventiveness within the organization?

## FROM ANARCHIST BEGINNINGS

The drive to create safe space, broaden the membership, secure more stable funding sources, and transition staff members towards clearly demarcated, interchangeable tasks and responsibilities are inseparable from political shifts within TIP. As outlined above, the organization has long grappled with the limits of anarchist modes of collective leadership, grassroots organizing, and consensus-based leadership. Or, as some have argued, the organization rather struggled with the tensions of overtly claiming this particular kind of leadership while implicitly guided by a small few in power. After piecing together some of TIP's past, I sense that the fatigue of keeping an unstable organization together may also underlie the desire for more clearly defined structures of power.

In 2005, under critique of TIP's leadership, McNamara lays out how their initial goals for collective empowerment, even while acknowledging that such shared leadership had not yet attained,

> If we were to create two interlocking circles representing TIP, we would see that in one circle there are the site's creators, and in the other there are the site's members. Or in more abstract terms, in one circle we have authority, in the other we have collective agency. Where these two circles intersect or overlap, we have the space in which authority is also collective agency, and where our collective agency is also authority. Unfortunately the model will not hold because the former conflation (authority being collective agency), is significantly more prevalent than the later conflation (our collective agency being authority). Nevertheless, to the extent with which we can think symbolically, our goal is to

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superimpose the circle of Our Collective Agency on that of the circle of Authority.[300]

Ten years later, DuBrul admits what happened in reality was less of the intersecting circles—to use McNamara's metaphors—and more of a silencing effect for those who felt their voices were not heard within either the base of collective agency or within the staff,

> Our anarchist inspired "anti-authoritarian" cultural imprint has made it seem alright for people to talk however they want to each other, and what that means is that some people's voices get to be a lot louder than other people's. It was not what we had intended, but we didn't have any other models we were working with. It's very refreshing to me that we're trying out a different style of moderation and I know it's painful and confusing for some folks, but try to put it in perspective, we're in a process of growth, and hopefully we're going to figure it all out together.[301]

Daniela Capistrano, the current national organizer and one of the more prominent faces of the national organization, provides a similar history as well,

> TIP originally followed a Food Not Bombs model of organizing; anyone could start a group and call it an Icarus Project local chapter, which resulted in both incredibly positive outcomes as well as problematic models of organizing that reinforced misogyny, racism, classism, transphobia and other forms of oppression due to lack of consistent mentorship, no formal accountability or intervention processes and volunteer turnover.
> TIP local chapters have supported thousands of people over the last twelve years, but many women and trans folks, POC and other marginalized individuals ended up leaving local Icarus groups after feeling abused, silenced or devalued. We also know that others stopped engaging on TIP Internet forums after going through interactions that left them feeling like the only voices that mattered in the TIP community were those from white "manarchists."[302]

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[300] Ashley "Jacks McNamara, "Re: A SPECTER IS HAUNTING."

[301] Facebook, Inc., "Sascha Altman DuBrul's post on The Icarus Project Facebook Page."

[302] Daniela Capistrano, "Why The Icarus Project."

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Moving away from anarchist beginnings, it seems like a hybrid of more authoritarian

approaches combined with some measure to find community consensus (through polling

and other methods). However, because the many digital and analog spaces that TIP

inhabits have varied norms, practices, and beliefs and require great finesse in steering

cultural shifts, it remains to be seen how the forums, Facebook groups, and local groups

respond to recent shifts in power.

Arguably, in comparison to many other Icarus spaces, the forums have maintained

a relatively horizontal, autonomous structure of leadership. Only requiring $200 a year to

remain on a hosting platform, the forums do not demand a large investment on the part of

the national organization. Early on, McNamara and DuBrul started off as moderators and

soon developed a 'mod' (moderation) team of volunteers to help ensure the tenor of the

conversation remained civil and cooperative. The need for a team of moderators was

made very apparent when a person with frenzied states of energy began posting

inflammatory comments on the forums at a high rate in 2005. DuBrul, one of the primary

moderators at that time and a target of that person's anger, stepped back as moderator and

contributor to the forums for several years, while volunteer moderators mina, empties,

and room42 took on more leadership roles. Since then, volunteers who switch off

organically over the years have taken up moderation.

To join the forum, I simply made up a username (efletcher), created a password,

and provided an e-mail address. Because I felt it was unethical to "lurk" or participate on

the forums without introducing myself and providing forum users additional information

about who I was and the project I was doing, I "violated" the norms most people

established to remain anonymous and go by their username on the forums. I posted links

to my website and blog and provided a few video updates that forum contributors could

easily access my real name and image if they choose to do so. As a forum user once told me,

> The forums work when it is apparent that nobody is going to do anything in particular with any responses they get. i.e., they work when people are sharing experiences and asking personal questions to do with their own current struggles. These are the kinds of discussions I use the forums for, and from reading the threads that other people start, I would guess that I am in the majority here.[303]

As they implied, the forums worked (or did not work) for me well initially due to my instrumental motivation (to collect data) that most people on the forums did not have. More so than "outing" my identity, my overtly utilitarian agenda did not invite the same kind of welcoming response that some newcomers received on the forums.

In August 2014, when I first made contact with people on the forums, I found myself being questioned by those who thought it was unethical for me to represent TIP when my own mental health challenges had never led me to take off significant time from work or school or by the fact that I had never been involuntarily committed to a psychiatric ward.[304] Others found it presumptuous for me to use Icarus language I found on the forums (e.g. "folx," "craxy," "Icaristas," "mad love," "mad appreciation," "Mad Ones"), when I was just a newcomer to the forums; and still others suggested ways I could stop "trying too hard" to gather information for the dissertation when rather I should ease into the community by participating more on the forums informally.[305] A research participant in Asheville who spent time on many forums online gave me the following advice to reaching out to people in TIP,

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[303] K., e-mail message to author, September 30, 2014.

[304] efletcher (Erica Fletcher), "Dissertation Research Thread," August 12, 2014, accessed May 7, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=35634.

[305] efletcher (Erica Fletcher), "What do the Icarus forums mean to you? the good, the bad, & the ugly," October 9, 2014, accessed May 7, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=35918.

If you are trying too hard, that will be felt. Energetics online are extremely potent. And especially for people who have been online for a long time, they will feel it if you are pushing, if you are too eager, it's like all the rules that happen in Real Life, it's almost like it is amplified online. And people are very sensitive energetically, especially people with psychiatric labels. So they are going to pick up any pushing or eagerness, basically, you have to find who you really are in that group. And maybe—it's not good for your research, or something you want to embrace in the moment when you are trying to find a way to fit in—but we really don't always fit in, in every circle.[306]

Taking some of the advice I had received to heart, I started checking in at the Daily Roll Call and telling Icarus contributors about my day and how I was doing on an emotional level. After a few weeks of persistence, I made a couple friends on the forums who supported the research and wanted to be involved in the process.

I am not alone in those who have found the forums even as a dynamic space is one that can to be a cliquish, one that requires an acculturation and level of credibility to find acceptance.[307] Having spent several years on the forum, Dan2013, a middle-aged research participant from Albany, NY, recognized the ways that the forums might feel intimidating or invalidating to others and offered me this advice as I was first starting to post on that space,

I would say this to anyone who comes on to Icarus—Hang on! It's always going to be a mixed bag, no matter what you do in life. So focus on the positive; and try to turn down the negative, rather than being scared. What bothers me the most is when a gentle soul gets hurt or offended or scared and runs away from the community, because what happens is that if everybody did that, then what would happen is that all the aggressive people would be the only ones there, and all the kind-hearted people would be driven off.[308]

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[306] Research Participant 2, focus group discussion with author, October 11, 2014.

[307] In terms of mental struggles, amount of medication taken, number of hospitalizations, etc.

[308] Dan2013, phone conversation with author, October 1, 2014.

At some level, Dan suggested that people who found a home on the forums also gained somewhat of a "thicker skin" when it came to online interactions; and because he feels the stakes are lower within online interaction than they are in "real life," there are more opportunities to act poorly with fewer immediate social repercussions.

As previous mentioned, most ARMHC attendees do not use the forums, a common occurrence with those who live in close proximity to active Icarus chapters. And as one ARMHC attendee indicates, their experiences on forums were that of alienation and further isolation; to that end, they describe the space as follows "…it's that phenomenon of the forums being used by a relatively small group of people to establish a group identity that can be othering to newcomers. And there is a weird status and hierarchy of length of involvement or intimacy with organizational history. And it's really a lot of bullshit. A bubble world."[309] Another person shared me with me some of her thoughts on similar awkward encounters on the forums,

> I always found them hostile and uncomfortable. Personally, I don't like them. I've never hung out there. I've also had some very close friends who are very deeply involved in Icarus. So it is not that I don't like Icarus, but that particular grouping of folks at the time I was there—I don't know if it is the same anymore, these things change a lot, they morph, and evolve. They are always changing. But at the time I was there…I never felt comfortable there or at home…That is the nature of community and grouping.[310]

Likewise, it took me several months to feel more accepted on the forums; and without investing energy into this space on a daily basis, I could see how it would be difficult to find support and a sense of community on this space.

However, as I became more accustomed to participating on the forums, I began to see why the forums were once thought of as the core of TIP. There is something to the

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[309] Research participant 1, focus group discussion with author, October 11, 2014.
[310] Research participant 2, focus group discussion with author, October 11, 2014.

perceived anonymity, the ability to be multiple characters on the forums, and the relatively slow pace of responses that makes it relatively easy to have long, personal conversations. Some people have pages where they journal and receive support from other's comments. On the forums, people often write in paragraph-long responses and even in short essay format. Those with less anxiety towards writing and more effusive modes of expression literally take up more space on the forums, as their paragraphs of writing burgeon out into many discussion threads. What is as more, as Monica mentioned, as people have come and gone on the forums, the tenor has shifted significantly. As DuBrul who has come and gone from the forums throughout years explains, the number, length, quality of arguments, and intensity of conversations has waned over time, as Facebook began to change the way that people communicated with each other in a more rapid, shorter manner.[311]

Indicating that he has some struggles picking up on social cues and carrying on conversations in person, Dan2013 describes his preference for socializing on the forums over analog communication,

> The same way I find it easier talking one on one talking with a person, I find it easier to interact digitally, the number of variables are reduced. You don't have to be doing face-to-face, reading body language, or facial expressions, so I think [being] online simplifies communication, because it takes out certain social variables. Like I find it easier to be myself online than I do in normal social situations. Which is one reason—I'm going to pat myself on the back—I come across pretty well online, but that's like having good phone manner. I really do try and be helpful, because it helps reinforce my own feelings of self-worth.[312]

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[311] Sascha Altman DuBrul, conversation with author, March 26, 2015. Note: Even in Emily Martin's account of the flame war on the forums in 2008, I had not seen the same kind of intensity within disagreements while I spent time conducting research on that space (approximately August 2014-February 2015). See Emily Martin, "Self-making and the brain." *Subjectivity* 3, no. 4 (2010): 366- 381.

[312] Dan2013, phone conversation with author, October 1, 2014.

When Dan2013 left the forums for a time when he was hospitalized for a few days in December, several Icarus contributors expressed their concern for his wellbeing online. Their care for him was obvious, and while he was away for the forums, another contributor started a discussion thread for him to read when he was back online. Later, after he was discharged, I found out, ironically enough through exchanging a few e-mails and voices messages with him, that he decided once to try spend less time online, that he felt as though spending too much time online contributed—in part—to his extreme mental state. He told me "I am trying to go day by day. Who knows what tomorrow might bring?"[313] While he has remained a presence on the forums during the last few months, I wonder how he perceives the difference between analog and digital interactions. While both may be challenging for him in varied ways, it seems like both are a vital part of his mental stability.

On the forums, the pace of conversations moves more slowly than those in person or on the Icarus Facebook group. Ideas can be fleshed out gradually, and conversations can build, lead to new discussion threads, or derail initial topics. I have seen some forum users start flame wars, have fall-outs, or leave entirely, just as I have read about people using the forums as a lifeline and their primary form of social interaction throughout their day.[314] Moderators usually take an observational approach to conversations, only intervening when there is defamatory speech or when the topic derailed far away from the original post.

Despite the multitude of ways people use the site and the fewer number of voices on the forums following the rise of Facebook, there is a certain permanence to the site, as

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[313] Dan2013, e-mail message to author, December 16, 2014.

[314] A couple people who identity with having Asperger's Syndrome have told me that they find digital spaces to be an integral part of their social life, one that allows them to share their ideas without the ambiguities of face-to-face interaction, which often difficult for them to follow.

discussions can be searched and sorted and made available from the forums' inception.

Dan2013 describes the space as follows,

> …there is a stability here that I suspect is not as common on Facebook. People write in long form, and Threads persist. As a result, we can have extended deep conversations, and we have a visible history and repository of knowledge. The design on Facebook is more ephemeral, superficial, and stream of consciousness. We are more permanent and persistent.[315]

The stability of the space and the opportunity to articulate ideas carefully has mitigated some of the disputes on the forums, and kindness alongside long-term presence on the site does much for building credibility on the forums.

FightforRoses, an Icarus forum contributor since 2008, met me and participated in a recorded interview with me while she was passing through Asheville for a few days on her travels.[316] In our interview, she spoke about the clout that old-time forum users have within the community and their idealization of the past days of TIP as "some mythical pure revolutionary past that has gotten watered down. And a few months later, FightforRoses commented on a discussion thread that I had started as a part of the research project to articulate the many ways that the community on the Icarus forum has created informal, rather horizontal leadership structures.

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[315] Dan2013, "Welcome The Icarus Forum Community," February 11, 2015, accessed March 1, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=36551&p=321576.

[316] FightforRoses had started participating in the forums when she was in high school and had seen many discussions of Icarus leadership and organizing models unfold since then. Over coffee at Odd's Café in West Asheville, we talked about the history of psychiatry, one of her academic interests, as well as her experiences being a longtime member of the forums. Since she had traveled by bus and lack alternative transportation, I drove her around the city to do some shopping, among other errands, and dropped her to a hostel. She left North Carolina to protest mountaintop removal with fellow environmental activists in Tennessee.

What I see much more as true leadership, is like, people from within the online community stepping up to moderate, and continuing to do so as volunteers for years and years, people spending hours on chat talking other people through crisis and setting up group phone calls on a regular basis to break through the limits of the digital format, people starting local groups and turning their own homes and spaces in their own communities into safe respites and 'counter-psych' services, so to speak, people keeping the website running while living out of goddamn vans, people starting dialogues here and making art and zines and literature out of that to get the message out.[317]

Although she acknowledges the struggles caused by finances and logistics with the national organization, she—like many other forum users—feels that the forums are in many ways separate from the national organization. As others on the site have pointed out, aside from the technical aspects of site maintenance and upkeep, the moderators and forum community remain largely autonomous from the national organization. And when national Icarus staff has made announcements on the forums, they are often met with some resistance to changes proposed and skepticism about their intent, even when they seek to solicit comments and feedbacks on improving the site.[318] For these reasons, among their own time constraints, communication preferences, and lack of pay for participating on the forums, many current Icarus staff do not participate on the forums for personal support—further exacerbating a perceived divide between the national staff and other Icarus contributors.[319]

What I found most telling about the role that the forums play in people's lives was an event on February 8, 2015 in which the forums shut down and thousands of

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[317] FightforRoses, "What do the Icarus forums mean to you? the good, the bad, & the ugly," November 14, 2014, accessed February 15, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=35918&start=20#p315808.

[318] On Facbeook, Dubrul wrote, "There is still a small community of folks on the icarus forums but it is very quiet around there and does have the quality of a ghost town. a few months back we tried to reconnect with the community and we were treated like foreigners and invaders, which was kind of wild, it was a very strange experience." Facebook, Inc., "Sascha Altman Dubrul's Facebook page."

[319] in.exile, "Dissertation Research Discussion," September 1, 2014, accessed Feb 22, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=35634.

conversations disappeared without notice. The transition that day to the new Icarus

Project Website meant that the forums, which are connected to that platform, were

temporarily inoperable. My own reaction when I tried to visit the forums that day was

one of shock and worry at the thought of losing all the conversations to which I

contributed over the course of several months. Several others were upset by the lack of

notification regarding the website maintenance, especially those in crisis who found it

incredibly distressing to be away from their community when they needed intense peer

support.[320] When the forums returned a day later, people wrote about how they did not

realize how much they missed seeing people post on the site until it was gone and how

much others' presence on the site impacts them on a daily basis.

       With rumors of an overhaul to the forums in January 2015[321] and the unexpected

shut down of the forums for a day in February, many contributors to the forum were on

edge about the stability of the forums moving forward. A couple long-term Icarus

volunteers and former staff members with coding experience even proposed migrating

the forums over to an Icaxus website and operating as a rogue, breakaway group, a shift

that would take just a few days to accomplish. Because TIP publications were through

Creative Commons copyright, theoretically past Icarus contributors could use Icarus

materials at meetings and in digital spaces as well. However, once the forums were

reassured that the national organization had no intention of changing the forums and that

the rumors (spread from a miscommunication on Facebook) were false, conversations

about a mass exodus from the national organization's authority largely died down. Still, I

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[320] Dan2013, "Overposting," February 9, 2015, accessed March 1, 2015.
http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=111&t=36553.

[321] This rumor proved to be a miscommunication sparked by confusion around
Capistrano's use of the word "forums" to refer to the national Facebook group, a
miscommunication that was later clarified by Vidal. See Agustina, "Re: icarus forums folx
start new forums?" February 3, 3015, accessed March 29, 2015.
http://www.theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=36473&p=321065#p321060.

was surprised by the precarity of even the forums—seemingly the most grassroots space within TIP—was held together.

When one is solely judged by the quality of their writing, their punctuation and grammar, and the number of posts they write, I began to wonder about subliminal discriminatory practices might still be entrenched within the forum's ethos. What kind of language has the most social traction? Do the forums allow for "safe space" as conceived by the national organization? Could they serve as a model for other Icarus spaces? Some have argued that issues related to gender and race are largely done away with in a forum that does not allow for overt markers of such attributes, unless a person feels like writing out a description about how they self-identify. Others have felt wary of even posting about their appearance, cultural background, or gender for fear that their experiences would be invalidated or discredited on the site. What is more, language—despite forum user's anonymity—can still be used as discriminatory tool, as those who are unable or unwilling to ascribe to the norms of "proper" English may be met with distain or silence, as are those who hold more conservative perspective.

Throughout my time on the forums, I found it difficult to make any substantial comparisons between the forums and other Icarus spaces. Yes, the forums—at times— have a chummy, cliquish feel to them, and it can be difficult to gain entry and recognition at first within the community. Yet the people—perhaps those with a "thicker" skin—who remain on the forums find a real sense of community and mutual appreciation for each other's digital presence. Conversations about decolonization practices and discussions of race and oppression have bled into the forums from those who are on the Icarus Facebook page, but there is no strong push from the national organization to make such conversations a primary focus of the forums—nor anyway for them to impose such dialogue (since the forums remain somewhat of a space dictated by popularity and long

term presence).[322] What is more, because the forums are largely separate from the national organization and conversations between moderators and staff have been fairly minimal, it seems like the forums will remain a small yet lively community space for those interested in digital support and mutual aid. Nevertheless, from this description, it becomes clear that the technical scaffolding channels certain modes of participation, while constraining and circumscribing others. The terms for what it means to be a part of TIP are built into the coding—whether it is created directly by contributors (like the forums) or furthered indirectly through corporations (like Facebook and MySpace).

## NATIONAL FACEBOOK GROUP

Started in 2007, TIP's main Facebook group has over four thousand members; and with such a large membership, conversations happen rapidly and get lost in the newsfeed as more topics arise. People post links to articles and videos on issues related to mental states, ask for feedback and crowd source support when they are in crisis, and share personal experiences with mental struggles, the effects of psycho-pharmaceutical medication, and tips for coping with mental suffering. The success of Facebook is a success in short-form engagement, in aesthetic presence over depth, instantaneity over intimacy.

With the lack of anonymity on Facebook, the stakes of "outing" members as mad, calling people out for certain beliefs, or facing other social repercussions in "real life" are

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[322] The Icarus Project's rather hands-off stance towards the largely autonomous forums allows for conversations on race and privilege, and Icarus members have engaged in such spaces in a way that can support each other and find comfort within the relative anonymity afforded to them online. However, there a possibility that forums are mostly white people speaking with each other, so if people of color do begin joining this space and calling out racist statements, it remains to be seen how long time members will respond. See in.exile, "Ferguson open thread for ranting about police and racism," November 24, 2014, accessed March 3, 2015, http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=40&t=3612.; Inel, "Design Organization That Makes Icarus Obsolete!," January 30, 2014, accessed March 1, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/forums/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=18406.

great. Facebook itself has implemented measures to curb suicidal ideation,[323] and social researchers can even predict when a person goes through a manic episode by tracking Facebook usage.[324] What is more, because identity on Facebook is also tied to personal and professional realms, the risk for participating on Icarus Project groups on Facebook, is more severe than the repercussions for being "outed" on forums.

In terms of that National Organizing Collective's presence on the Facebook group, the page did not have consistent moderation until more recent years. Because staff capacity to moderate was often limited, the Facebook group at times operated in a similar way to the forums, with some contributors stepping up to moderate or at least contest a comment when it seemed unfair, oppressive, or hateful. As a part of their responsibilities as part time Icarus staff members, Faith Rhyne and Agustina Vidal also moderated posts on the Facebook group, a position that was taken up—among other tasks—as a full time position by Daniela Capistrano in December 2014. (Many local Icarus Projects groups, like ARMHC, have their own Facebook groups; and while staff members have "joined" those groups, they have operated autonomously and with little moderation from the national organization.)

TIP's closed group on Facebook seems to be the site where much of the contention over a more strict moderation style has stemmed. With greater attention channeled towards "centering" people of color, the organization hired Daniela Capistrano, a national organizer who identifies as a person of color; and soon, members on Facebook group started to grapple with what this process of "centering" meant and what was considered appropriate behavior on the page. The banning of those on TIP

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[323] Alexis Kleinman, "Facebook Adds New Feature For Suicide Prevention," *The Huffington Post*, February 25, 2015, accessed March 1, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/25/facebook-suicide-prevention_n_6754106.html.

[324] Roisin Kiberd, "How Facebook Can Be Used to Predict a Manic Episode," *Vice*, December 12, 2014, accessed March 1, 2015. http://motherboard.vice.com/read/how-facebook-can-be-used-to-predict-a-manic-episode.

Facebook group who were perceived as engaging in oppressive speech, insisting that local Icarus groups enter into accountability practices and regular communication with the national organization (or change their name and stop claiming affiliation with the national organization), and the curt dismissal of a longstanding Icarus volunteer led to great contention on the forums and the national Facebook group. Intense discussions followed concerning appropriate moderation policies, methods for implementing a new authoritarian approach to national leadership, and the goals of the organization in "centering" people of color. Some participants in TIP felt that the changes were too rapid and made without open channels of communication. Others welcomed the change and felt that this new direction would indeed usher in a more diverse membership and create safe space for people of color to share their experiences.

On February 6, 2014, Daniela Capistrano posted a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on TIP's Facebook group. The following definition of "centering" people of color reads, "To 'center' the voices of indigenous & people of color and other marginalized folks means to be respectful, intentional and mindful about the ways that you interact with people of color and other marginalized folks within this discussion group, in relation to conversations about race and injustice." Capistrano provides the following examples as inappropriate behavior on the Facebook group that have contributed to institutional racism,

> - A white person questioning an IPOC's (Indigenous people and people of color) decision to bring up topics about racial injustice, claiming that this group "should not see color." People of color and other marginalized folks have a right to discuss the ways that systems of oppression impact their mental health.
> - A white person claiming that all people regardless of their background are affected by mental health systems in the same ways. This is not true. IPOC and disabled folks are disproportionately impacted.[325]

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[325] Daniela Capistrano, "FAQs on Facebook Moderation," The Icarus Project Facebook page, February 6, 2015, accessed February 8, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/groups/2394863930/10152769235008931/.

After the FAQs had been posted and a date set for comments and polling concerning

community guidelines, the Facebook group settled back into its normal flow.

Interestingly, an Icarus contributor started another Facebook closed group for those in

TIP who identify as black, indigenous, or otherwise a person of color.

As a member of this new group, I have enjoyed reading articles and introductions

by people who self-identify as nonwhites. I find a sense of solidarity in the shared

understanding that the effects of racism and ethnocentrism have played a large role in our

upbringing and socialization. However, I also recognize that the identity politics of

pitting whites against nonwhites further perpetuates an artificial divide—a historic

problem within third wave feminism. In response to a recent post on this group

questioning the legitimacy of someone who is often read in the US as a white Latina, I

first identified myself as someone who could be classified as biracial and triethnic then

wrote,

> … if we are to take seriously that there are very few biological markers of "race" and that "race" is largely a social construct, then what does it mean to ostracize people in the group who might—at times—identify as "white"? Does claiming a safe space for people of color then create static identities and prevent us from changing identities or performing different aspects of who we are? For "passing" when it makes sense to pass? I don't know how others might feel about this, but for me, to say that a person who identifies as a white Latino AND as someone whose life has also been deeply affected by marginalization and oppression isn't allowed here also seems questionable. Should skin color define acceptance anywhere?[326]

Others inquiring how "Latin" so angered the original poster that they deleted their initial

query, and this thread is no longer visible. This is not only another example of the

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[326] Erica Fletcher's post on BIPOCarus *Facebook* group, March 1, 2015, accessed March 1, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/groups/732027616905417/.

instability around digital media, but also the difficulties of discussing issues of race online and performing aspects of identity online. More broadly, although I understand the desire for a place to feel a sense of camaraderie through shared experience, my worry with the direction TIP has taken to decolonize and affirm the presence of people of color is that the lines for whose voices are included and what language can be tolerated becomes all-too-quickly demarcated. The potential for people of color to silo themselves in other closed group and end their participation within the main group—while creating a sense of cohesion and solidarity—might detract from TIP's overall goal to center conversations about race within a broader membership base, foster reflective dialogue about institutional racism, and educate contributors about the intersections of race, gender, and class within social determinants of mental states.[327]

One contributor to TIP who reached out to me via e-mail articulates the conundrum of identity politics beautifully in their writing,

> Sometimes, people try to use the internet as some kind of social justice machine, because the relative accessibility of social media seems to allow people with little territory in geographic/social space to develop a place of belonging online. However, it seems fairly common for these online places to become equally territorial - but in this case, the territory is not land or money or bodies, but identity. Sometimes, when browsing tumblr, twitter, and other places, I feel like the things people laud as the progressive potentials of technology are really just supporting the same old combative system from which these online places allegedly allow us to escape. In these scenarios, being is a performance, and it has to be the 'right' performance, and it is conceptualised as a kind of territorial will within a finite existential landscape. The infinity of internal being is ignored in favour of a surface level grab for identity-space. The upshot of this is that the mechanism by which a person can feel as though their existence is valid is the same mechanism by which one is perpetually undeserving of space, because the

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[327] In private correspondence, I talked with a person who felt scared to participate on the Facebook group for fear that their questions or comments about racism would seem oppressive. Having seen comments that people of color were tired of teaching whites about oppression, they took it upon themselves to do more reading on "centering," intersectionality, intergenerational trauma, and micro-aggressions to better understand how the national organization used such language. Another person saw The Icarus Project's attempts at operationalizing intersectionality as a way to appease white guilt.

> narrative of 'social justice' combined with the narrative of 'finite performative space' means that performing justice necessarily entails using space that another person might potentially (justly) 'deserve' more than you do.[328]

Even in my own response on the Facebook group, I found myself claiming the very performance of being a person of color to speak, even while diminishing the importance of that claim. And what is worse, within a "surface level grab for identity space," the number of participants within an Icarus group for people of color could be seen as quantitative "proof" that the decolonization process has been achieved its goals in creating safe space. Thus the possibility for other conceptions of identity and selfhood outside of such definitions to flourish is tempered. In this manner, the attempt to impose singular definitions of safe space in the name of reflexivity does so at the risk of further objectifying the membership and operationalizing diversity as a tool, rather than treating it as a never-ending process in itself.

## LOCAL GROUPS

Having participated in a group that used to be at the center of national organizing efforts (given Rhyne's former position), I gathered that local groups historically have had great autonomy, even to the extent that they would form and disappear without the national organization's awareness. Conceptualized like Food Not Bombs chapters in which any group could embody anarchist principles and actions within a local setting, TIP's publication *Friends Make the Best Medicine: A Guide to Creating Community Mental Health Support Networks* provides some insight into how to do community organizing and the underlying principles of inclusivity and diversity that ought to guide local chapter meetings. Advice included within the publication indicates a strong awareness for "how power and privilege play out by [in] understanding how white

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[328] K., e-mail message to author, November 20, 2015.

supremacy, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and other forms of oppression affect each of us and impact our participation in the group."[329] To curb the effects of "power and privilege," organizers counsel potential community organizers,

> Notice who tends to be in leadership roles in your group, and rotate if possible. If your group is often organized and facilitated by folks of a certain race and class background, see what you can do to invite other members to step into leadership roles and help shape what happens in the group. If men dominate the conversation, see what techniques you can use to make space for women and gender non-conforming people. Sometimes you need to shift from a structure where people get called on if they raise their hands to a go-around where everyone has a turn to speak.[330]

Implicit in their guidance to shift leadership roles and encourage the participation of all members of the group is a democratic, nonhierarchical stance towards community building. Nevertheless, in practice, this advice was difficult to replicate, as many group facilitators found it difficult to rotate leadership positions or "make space" for others to share their experiences.

All chapters I surveyed affirm that "holding safe space" is a challenge. In a local group meeting in Asheville, we defined safe space as follows:

- To express ourselves without worry about saying the wrong thing.
- To feel genuinely heard and honored in our experience.
- To trust that people are not going to analyze, criticize, or pathologize our experiences.
- To be aware and conscientious of power, issues of inclusion, and privilege and how that shapes experiences, mental health care options, and identities.
- To define for ourselves who we are, what we should do, or how we should do it.

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[329] The Icarus Project, *Friends Make the Best Medicine: A Guide to Creating Community Mental Health Support Networks*, 2nd ed. (New York City, NY: The Icarus Project, 2013, 4.

[330] Ibid.

- To speak without fear that you will be commodified, objectified, or manipulated to fulfill another's desires.
- To find connection with other people who "get it."[331]

What others understand this phrase to mean remains unclear to me, but I was curious by the consensus from local groups that safe space is indeed difficult to hold. Some organizers offer that meeting in semi-private locations, building long-term relationships, calling out fraught gender dynamics, taking turns talking and listening, creating guidelines, and holding each other accountable are some practices they find helpful. In addition, many of the groups surveyed struggled to find adequate physical space to meet and with emotional burnout from facilitation responsibilities. Even as I now write this chapter just four months after the survey was completed, three of the five groups surveyed no longer conduct in-person meetings.

Soon after she was hired as a national organizer, Daniela Capistrano continued the current staff's vision of "fixing" the organization's historic traps of replicating oppressive behavior within the workplace and other communal spaces. To that end, Capistrano began surveying the Icarus local groups and scheduled phone interviews with local groups to learn more about the meeting structure, demographics of the group, promotion of meetings within the community, accessibility of the group meeting space, and outreach to local community organizations serving people of color. She informed general membership of this process and justified such actions in the following Facebook post to the national organization's page (among other digital spaces),

> Radical mental health advocacy & justice talk means very little when not consistently backed up by practices that center accessibility and inclusivity. There is a learning curve involved in these processes and part of my job with TIP is to help those (who want the help) to decolonize and optimize their organizing practices and skill set, in order to sustain tangibly beneficial systems of radical

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[331] Faith Rhyne to ARMHC mailing list, August 27, 2014.

mental health resources in their area. Accountability is part of this process—anyone who organizes as a representative of TIP moving forward will be a part of a community accountability process. Part of my vetting process when working with local organizers is to evaluate how cooperative (or resistant) existing local organizers are with participating in accountability processes. The end goal is to make sure every local Icarus group is, among other things, able to meet consistently in a safe and accessible space, is run by a person or people who actively support and participate in decolonization processes, and is set up to connect local members with information they need in order to create self-care plans if that is something they seek.[332]

The optimization of organizing practices, under the rhetoric of accountability and inclusivity, thus furthers the neoliberalization of group facilitators' roles as producers of particular outcomes and "end goals." Within the vetting process, the ability to communicate regularly with the national organizer is implicitly a new prerogative of maintaining "citizenship" or affiliation with TIP.

This push is further evidenced by questions to discern group interest for participating in bimonthly calls for local group organizer and in bimonthly one-on-one calls with her to talk about issues arising in group meetings and to discuss the national organization's efforts to decolonize TIP from within.[333] I participated in the phone survey of the ARMHC, along with two other local attendees; and we expressed willingness to learn more about the national organization's plans and potentially participate in four calls a month, future workshops on decolonization, and read Icarus material connecting patriarchy, white privilege, and other forms of oppression to their effects on mental states.

Participants on the call were curious about the potential for greater consistent support from national organization, even while they were wary of the increased time commitment, among other requirements that TIP may now expect from local chapters, in

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[332] Daniela Capistrano's post on The Icarus Project Facebook page, January 2, 2015, accessed January 3, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/groups/2394863930/.

[333] Daniela Capistrano, phone conversation with author, January 6, 2015.

order for them to retain their affiliation. However, given the ARMHC's current state, it remains to be seen whether the group will remain a part of TIP. As of March 2015, no one in the group was willing or at the capacity to participate as a chapter representative—either locally, as a facilitator of the group  or as a liaison at the national level with the requisite bi-monthy support calls and one-on-one conversations with the national staff; and because no one is paid for their organizing efforts, the only incentive to serve the group comes from the generosity of its attendees—even at the cost of their own wellbeing.

After years of being largely autonomous and unaccountable to anyone except local constituents, some group facilitators did not feel like it was their place to speak for the group; nor did they understand what changes the national organizer might ask them to make to local group functions. While the national organization staff acknowledged such limitations, they would not compromise on the need for greater communication and accountability within local groups if individual chapters were to retain their national affiliation; and as a part of their goals for sustainable development, they thought it might be better to have a fewer active chapters following the national organization's lead, than chapters only in name that might misrepresent TIP's new goals.

Despite the challenges in establishing connection to the national organization, some local Icarus organizers expressed great excitement about more directive leadership from the national organization. One person with whom I spoke seemed excited about the possibility having more support and outreach advice from a national organizer, given that the group he attempted to start did not have enough participants to host regular meetings. Other local groups have changed their names and ended their affiliation with TIP. Now, with greater demands for availability and openness to the accountability processes, it remains to be seen how many chapters will rise to the challenge of holding safe space and begin the process of decolonizing their groups and widening their base.

As a part of TIP's efforts to establish connection with all active groups and assess their attributes, the Facebook groups that no longer had an active presence on or offline were asked to change their names and to end their representation as a local Icarus chapter. In their place, Facebook groups were made as placeholders for local organizers from those cities who were interested in working with the national organization. In total, as of March 26, 2015, TIP lists 15 local Icarus affinity group.[334]

## ST. LOUIS RADICAL MENTAL HEALTH COLLECTIVE:
## A CASE STUDY OF STRUCTURAL SHIFTS IN NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The St. Louis Radical Mental Health Collective began as a Facebook group in September 2014. Initially called Icarus Project-STL, the group had been established as a new iteration of a past group that had dispersed in the same region several years prior. Kerry McCullen, one of the founding members of the most recent group, discovered TIP while grappling with the trauma of witnessing fellow protestors assaulted by the Ferguson police during the Michael Brown protests and with the death of a radical community member to suicide—amongst a number of other stressors (See Figure 2).[335] In

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[334] Active groups include Culver City, CA; East Bay, CA; Portland, OR; emerging groups are in Sacramento, CA, Portland, OR (for those who identify as mixed race or people of color), Seattle, WA, Denver, CO, Prescott, AZ, St. Louis, Cincinnati, OH, New Orleans, LA, Atlanta, GA, and Greensboro, NC; and groups in transition are listed as Asheville, NC, Chapel Hill, NC, and New York City, NY. The Icarus Project, "Icarus Project Local Chapters and Affinity Groups," March 2015, accessed March 27, 2015. http://theicarusproject.net/content/icarus-project-local-chapters-and-affinity-groups. Note: This list does not include international Icarus-affiliated chapters, including those in England, Spain, and those in Central and South America.

[335] It should be noted that I had spent quite a bit of time with Kerry McCullen before this kerfuffle occurred. I had first met her on a conference call led by Faith Rhyne. In 2014, McCullen had grappled with the stress of participating in the Ferguson protests and with the death of a radical community member in St. Louis. In response, she started researching radical approaches to mental health online and stumbled across The Icarus Project. Inspired by their message, McCullen started organizing events in St. Louis and reached out to Rhyne for support in mad activism. We talked on the phone and Skyped a number of times before McCullen asked to visit Asheville and meet us in person. I hosted her at my place for a week, showed her around the city, and introduced her to local community organizers. I have known

response, she started researching radical approaches to mental health online and stumbled across TIP's website (See Figure 4). Inspired by the organization's message, McCullen—along with others—started planning events in St. Louis, and since its rebirth in the fall, the group has hosted monthly events, facilitated support group meetings, and held lively discussion on its Facebook page.[336]

Now for the conflict: On January 1, 2015, McCullen announced on the national organization's Facebook page that she would facilitate a support call for those who wanted to talk to other Icarus contributors across the nation. This support call, which had been conducted intermittently in the past by a former Icarus Project staff person, was read by some of the current national staff as stepping over the boundaries of Icarus contributors in organizing events that were not directly condoned by the national organization. Furthermore, as the thread unfolded and escalated in tone, McCullen was accused of white privilege in speaking for the new national organizer (who self-identifies as a person of color) and enacting a micro-aggression against her. Framing this dispute as a racial issue, national staff members sought to reprimand McCullen's actions and use her words as an example of white privilege, indicate recent changes towards more strictly enforced moderation policy, clarify leadership roles within the organization, and elaborate upon the importance of creating anti-oppressive spaces online. Feeling like she had been a scapegoat for larger structural shifts within the national organization and that her actions had been grossly misinterpreted, McCullen took a break from Facebook and from communication with TIP for a few days.

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her to be a caring, sensitive, well-intentioned person; and I consider her a friend. When I read the discussion on micro-aggression on Facebook, I saw McCullen's actions as an overreaction to what was clearly—in my mind—a simple miscommunication in which she unnecessarily became a scapegoat for larger institutional shifts.

[336] In addition, McCullen visited the local Icarus group where I was conducting fieldwork in Asheville, NC and met the former local support group organizer; and I hosted her at my place for a week in October 2014, showed her around the city, and introduced her to local community organizers.

This miscommunication online was compounded by a difficulty in scheduling a meeting for Capistrano, as the new national organizer, to survey and assess the St. Louis chapter. As a part of TIP's recent effort to assess its demographics and establish connection with all active groups, attempts to contact all groups affiliated with TIP and understand the scope of their organization for themselves were well underway. As previously mentioned, all Icarus Facebook groups that no longer had an active presence on or offline were asked to change their names and to end their representation as a local Icarus chapter.[337] Because accountability between local groups and the national organization and timeliness in scheduling meetings were strongly encouraged, some people felt that TIP did not adequately account for the limitations of local group organizers in making plans to communicate with the national organization and scheduling what could potentially be an anxiety-provoking meeting.

Although McCullen had felt personally attacked by staff members, this pressure to schedule a meeting between the national organization and the St. Louis group especially was the primary reason that the St. Louis Radical Mental Health Collective decided to change its name and end its affiliation with TIP. Soon after McCullen's terse exchanges with the national organization, other contributors to Icarus-St. Louis stepped up to moderate the Facebook group and asked interested parties to participate in a conference call to discuss the group's affiliation with TIP.[338] From that discussion, one contributor decided to meet with the new national organizer and start an Icarus-St. Louis group in addition to the group McCullen helped to start. The local Icarus group would

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[337] In their place, Facebook groups were made as placeholders for local organizer from those cities who were interested in working with the national organization.

[338] In the phone call, I was asked—as the only self-identified person of color in the meeting—to provide insight into the series of exchanges that led to the national organization's portrayal of her words as a micro-aggression against the new organizer. And while I felt uncomfortable representing anyone except myself, I did say that I thought much of the exchanges started innocently enough as simple miscommunication about boundaries of volunteer organizers and did not warrant the firestorm that came after it.

offer similar resources while tapping into the knowledge and support that could be gleaned from the national organization. Yet when a scheduling error occurred and meeting did not work out, that contributor quickly became disinterested in taking on the responsibility of being a liaison to the national organization, a shared position that was rumored to begin requiring four meetings every month with group facilitators. Soon, the group as a whole lost interest in the national affiliation as well.

While at first glance this might seem like a relatively trivial reason for ending group affiliation, my time in community with those with great sensitivities has taught me firsthand the great difficulties of scheduling meetings. When an ecology of emotional and mental resources is incredibly limited, decisions about how such reserves are spent are often made in the moment and frequently subject to change. And just two weeks after the initial dispute and group reflection, the mad community in St. Louis decided to end their nominal affiliation with TIP. Now renamed the St. Louis Radical Mental Health Collective, contributors continue to work independently to find a shared vocabulary to discuss racial inclusivity, understand white privilege, and create safe space within a group that retains a largely white membership in a physical place that is highly racially segregated, and within a political milieu in which race relations are incredibly tense.

Identity politics (and its extreme towards essentialism and tokenism) is all-too-often pitted against the Marxist critique that everyone suffers under capitalist expansion, and in the last several decades, the call to speak against injustice—to recognize universal class struggles—has been undermined by the need to speak precisely, in a "politically correct" or "culturally competent" manner—in a matter that attends to the particulars of who is speaking and their inability to speak for anyone else. And in attempts to be an "ally" to "oppressed" populations or to "speak from" a stance of the "marginalized," it becomes difficult to speak at all without reifiying disempowering rhetoric towards oneself and others and stilting the kind of conversations that can be had (for the sake of implementing an elitist, educated language in itself). Likewise, the local group's decision

to end affiliation with TIP—amidst the national organization's efforts to ban those on TIP Facebook group who were perceived as engaging in oppressive speech, to insist that local Icarus groups enter into accountability practices and regular communication with the national organization, and to dismiss longstanding Icarus volunteers—led to great contention within the larger community. Contributors expressed their concern about the shift from a consensus-based model of leadership towards a new seemingly undemocratic approach and the national organization's imposition of a singular vision, cultural norms, and mores to "center" people of color. While some Icarus contributors felt that the changes were too rapid and made without open channels of communication, others welcomed the change in moderation, felt more at comfortable and accepted on the page, and believed that this new direction would indeed usher in a more diverse membership and create safe space for people of color to share their experiences. In private, one Icarus contributor told me that they read TIP's attempts to operationalize diversity as a misguided way to appease white guilt, while another became too scared to participate on the national organization Facebook group's conversation on race for fear that their questions or comments as a white person would seem oppressive, racist, or otherwise insensitive. The fear of being banned from a group further compounded their anxieties about acceptance, a feeling that was exacerbated by their marginalization within society for their madness and sensitivities to the world.

After having conversations with multiple local group organizers and reading about the confusion and lack of communication about TIP's direction on the organization's forums and Facebook group, it became very clear to me that hardly anyone in TIP's liberal base is against racial inclusivity, per say. [339] Rather, questions

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[339] Still, my conversations with Icarus contributors about issues surrounding miscommunications and cultural clashes also make me wonder if I have presented this disagreement too gently—overlooking chronic discriminatory practices within the organization towards issues of gender and race—and if perhaps my own prejudices are playing out in my narration of this story.

surrounding the changing leadership structure became interpreted as somehow being against diversity. So while the primarily white base of mad constituents are not against further education about racial issues related to mental states, the concern remains that in steps taken to decolonize and affirm the presence of people of color, the lines for whose voices are included and what language can be tolerated becomes all-too-quickly demarcated; and in the process of decolonizing, TIP might further reify class and educational privileges in determining which terms can frame discussions on race. Furthermore, the fact that Icarus contributors who identify as black, indigenous, or otherwise people of color recently created a closed Facebook group for themselves could further limit the number people of color would participate in the "common grounds" for general discussion on the national organization's Facebook page.[340] It might also imply that TIP's goal to diversify its membership—in some ways—backfired to further silo or homogenize all non-white populations.

Regardless, this incident leads me to ask how might particular media such as Facebook lend themselves to certain, often limited kinds of conversations on diversity and cultural sensitivity? How might similar radical mental health groups begin to seek to cultivate diversity within their membership without themselves becoming a colonizer, even within the decolonization process? How can c/s/x movements hold space to usher in reflexivity and dialogue in the delicate process of fostering racial inclusivity? And how might a purposefully *imprecise* articulation of shared ground, in light of larger political injustices, become a more helpful starting point towards recognizing the intersections of race, gender, and class within c/s/x movements?

## The Paradox of Resiliency

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[340] This is not meant to imply that people of color do not have good reason to create separate spaces to discuss the intersections of racism and mental health, nor to imply that they always ought to represent their group of origin as a defining feature of their identity in spaces occupied by a white majority.

TIP's current trajectory is one that calls for resilience, sustainable development, and the securitization of a community in the face of danger and uncertainty. Such a perspective has both real and imagined effects; to this effect, Ulrick Beck notes, "On the one hand, many hazards and damages are already real today: polluted and dying bodies of water, the destruction of the forest, new types of disease, and so on. On the other hand, the actual social impetus of risks lies in the projected dangers of the future."[341] Given the reality that many members of TIP endure inherently unstable mental states and precarious lives, it is difficult to ascertain the place for resilience rhetoric in overtly empowering communities while disempowering them through prescriptive actions for preparing against unavoidable catastrophe. Such paradoxical roles can be seen in protocol to mitigate burnout amongst staff members of the national organization and to moderate the potential firestorms in digital communication.

## ORGANIZER BURNOUT

The tasks required of staff members often come with great emotional labor. Even those who are more distanced from the membership, such as bookkeepers and web developers, knowing that their work can impact those who are in incredibly precarious states gives their jobs a sense of gravity. Everyone who has worked or volunteered for the organization does so out of deep personal sensitivities to the potentially damaging narratives imposed by solely biopsychiatric frameworks of mental health, and for better or worse, most contributors have held high stakes in performing the emotional labor or working for a such grassroots organization.

Nevertheless, the high stakes of staff and volunteers' work for TIP make it incredibly stressful to serve in any one capacity for a great length of time. In certain cases, TIP and its staff have been credited with literally saving lives, as contributors have

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[341] Ulrick Beck, *Risk Society towards a New Modernity* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 1992), 323.

reached out to each other in times of acute crisis. Likewise, when TIP fails—such as on February 8, 2015—when the forums and website went offline without notice, contributors can become greatly angered and hurt by the removal of what they perceive as their only lifeline. In addition to resolving issues on the forums and the Facebook group, staff members must also navigate relationships with fellow staff members, who have their own unique sensitivities and struggles.

What is more, acquiring a position on the national staff may also come at the cost of alienating oneself from the membership base. Often joining the national organizing collective as volunteers and later as paid employees, many staff members experienced a distancing effect from the Icarus community they sought to serve. In many instances, staff members entered the national organizing collective because they themselves received support through the forums and wanted to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the organization. Yet, with their newfound leadership roles, some have felt that their paid positions in TIP undermined their ability to participate in the community while opening up their words and actions to greater scrutiny and critique.

In a private message through the Icarus forums, silverelf describes his experience in working for TIP,

> I quickly found out that the "collective" that I had become a part of was a sort of opaque group of folks who had been "hired" in various ways, some were present, some weren't, some had lots of job responsibilities, some didn't, some had been around Icarus for a long time, some newly hired on. I quickly found myself sucked into trying to turn this opaque weird cobbled together organizing collective into something more transparent and cohesive and accountable. I also found myself on the inside of a very weird wall and somewhat cut off from just being a normal part of the community that I had been a part of for so long. But I muddled through. As did a lot of other people.[342]

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[342] silverelf, private message to author, January 27, 2015.

Another staff member shared with me that they too felt tensions with their newfound role in a leadership position. They felt that non-paid Icarus contributors overly scrutinized their words and behaviors and did not consider their emotional and mental needs as much as they did for those outside of a pay structure. Another staff person told me that they knew that they needed to quit working for TIP when their job became so stressful that they needed to start taking psycho-pharmaceutical medicine again to continue working in that environment.

Furthermore, many National Organizing Collective members felt discomfort that they were not paid a living wage for the work they did put into the organization, and they were also perturbed by the fact that many others were doing intensive volunteer work for TIP without any compensation. In addition, because the organization currently does not supply technical equipment or office space, their collective members, consultants, advisory board members, and volunteers are required work from home and find access to "the Internet, Skype with video capability, GoogleDocs, and a phone" on their own.[343] Moreover, while hours are billable, the unspoken expectation is that staff members consider their work more in terms of a stipend, in which they work full-time without benefits such as health insurance and maternity leave. While attempts to raise funds to provide a living wage and benefits are in the works, there is a strong likelihood that TIP will run out of funds once again in July 2015.

In 2006, following a staff member's decline in mental stability and their tumultuous departure from the national organization, TIP published a Wellness Policy for Volunteers and Staff on their website. This document articulates the organization's willingness not only to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act but also to ensure that further measures were in place to protect staff in times of crisis and to extract them from situations that may prove harmful or detrimental to their wellbeing. This

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[343] The Icarus Project, "The Icarus Project Participant Handbook," (internal document, accessed March 15, 2015), 14.

document stands as a testament to the challenges of organizing in mad communities, which are inherently susceptible to the mental processes of which they seek to depathologize:

> Sometimes staff, interns, or volunteers may have ongoing difficulty fulfilling their responsibilities, following through on their commitments, and collaborating with others despite repeated efforts at extraordinary accommodation. In such instances the staff person or volunteer may be asked to take a break from Icarus work to focus on wellness and grounding before returning. They should expect to begin with more limited involvement and responsibilities, such as contract work or partnering with others on projects, to ensure they have regained enough wellness before continuing with their previous roles. It is hoped that breaks of this kind will promote personal growth and learning and allow people to develop their talents and capacities, so that they can make an even deeper and more meaningful contribution.[344]

The policy became a safety valve and a point of reference for staff members and volunteers who began to tire from the effects of stress, emotional exhaustion, or other mental turmoil. While a former volunteer with the organization appreciated that she could take this policy as an "out" while she was experiencing mania, a staff member felt that they were the victim of sanist or ableist expectations for the work she could produce. In any case, this protocol anticipates future of Icarus workers' instability just as it posits their eventual return to wellness.

The recent creation of TIP Participant Handbook clarifies some of the expectations for working at the organization. After a long history of incredibly high turnover rates, this document attempts to outline the structure of the organization (including the recent implementation of an advisory board which operates similarly to traditional nonprofit organizations' board of directors), protocol for decision-making, strategic planning, outlines of job descriptions, and policies towards conflict resolution.

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[344] The Icarus Project, "Wellness Policy for Volunteers and Staff," November 15, 2016, accessed February 21, 2015.
http://www.theicarusproject.net/wiki/wellnesspolicyvolunteersandstaff.

In outlining such protocol, TIP reveals its latest push towards resilience rhetoric, in preparing for the inevitable catastrophe of staffs' mental suffering. The handbook reads: "Individuals have a responsibility to commit only to tasks compatible with their wellness and sustainable involvement… You are encouraged to provide an emergency contact and to create a mad map to help Icarus members support your health and well-being."[345] This self-surveillance and the inevitable surveillance of other staff members, while informally done since before the collectivization of the project, is now codified into protocol, and the desire to preempt catastrophe could lead—at worst—to the self-fulfilling prophesy of staff burnout or—at the very least—a further analysis and objectification of fellow workers' actions as being potentially pathological.

**COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL**

Furthermore, protocol on conflict resolution also anticipates the risk of miscommunication on digital spheres. From past experiences of flamewars on the forums and Facebook groups amongst Icarus contributors[346] and bombastic language within staff's' internal communication, the following protocol outlines ways that such conflict can be resolved without digital communication:

> TIP supports direct and clear lines of respectful and supportive communication in the event of grievance, conflict, or interpersonal difficulty. Such communication is best done face to face, or, if face to face is not possible, on the telephone.
>
> No attempt should be made to resolve, process, debate or deal with interpersonal conflict issues of any kind over e-mail. This includes discussion forums, instant messaging, chat rooms, blogs, commenting, etc.
>
> Attempts to resolve conflicts or grievances over e-mail have consistently been shown not only to fail, but to make matters worse. E-mail is an impersonal and misleading medium that while helpful in rapidly transmitting information,

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345 The Icarus Project, "The Icarus Project Participant Handbook," 14.
346 See Emily Martin, "Self-Making and the Brain."

promotes miscommunication, misunderstanding, mistrust and confusion when it comes to interpersonal conflict and difficulty.[347]

The language within this protocol projects a fear of poor interpersonal dynamics into the future and seeks to mitigate that risk through analog interactions. (Interestingly, in the disagreements I have had with Icarus contributors, all of them began and found resolution via digital communication.) In this projected future, e-mails themselves become "impersonal" and "misleading," even while they—along with other forms of digital communication—remain the primary means of national organizing and community building.

Anxiety surrounds the realities and the projected realities of staff burnout and interpersonal conflict amongst those who share great sensitivities and diverse mental states. From this anxiety, protocols for preempting glitches create a narrative of resilience—in which TIP must continue to strive for stability within a chaotic, emotionally laborious workplace environment. Yet, the question remains whether these protocols actually stave off disaster, or if they are simply gestures towards the inevitability of difficult work situations. If the later is true, such protocol could further entrench Icarus staff members within pathological categories, as needing special attention and scrutiny for aberrant behavior. Resilience, as operationalized by the current Icarus staff, thus may come at the cost of following into similar neoliberal, individualizing traps of the bio-psychiatric gaze. Such internalized policing and the policing of others are hallmarks of neoliberalism, as "schemas of analysis" are used not only to determine staff productivity but pathology as well. The push towards resilience within the organization, that desire to sustain itself in perilous times through securing and controlling spaces,

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[347] The Icarus Project, "E-mail Conflict Policy for Volunteers, Interns, and Staff," November 16, 2006, accessed May 9, 2015. http://www.theicarusproject.net/icarus-organizational/e-mail-conflict-policy-for-volunteers-interns-and-staff.

might also be the mechanism for which the community loses some of its inventiveness, regional nuance, fluid identity(s), and dynamism.[348]

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[348] Perhaps an alternative to the rhetoric of resilience can be found in surrendering to moments of irrationality and the chaos of being mad together. K., an Icarus contributor from Washington, finds inspiration in philosopher Timothy Morton's theorization of "sinking in." K. understands this phrase to mean "the necessity of not trying to escape from horror, but to sink further into it to find the bottom, to find the exit from deep on the inside."Through a series of e-mails with me over the course of several months, they (preferred third-person pronoun) discuss "sinking in" with respect to madness and the double bind within biopsychiatry of pathologizing actions, so that those actions can be eliminated. And in pathologizing and objectifying oneself, one may give further credence to the very mental crisis she is trying to mitigate. K, summarizing Morton, thus remarks, "Sometimes, the idea of escaping from something is already built into the structure of the thing, so that in trying to get away all you do is reinforce the original trap." (See K., e-mail message to author, October 1, 2014)

The biopsychiatric bind K. posited parallels the one found in TIP's aims in "centering" people of color and creating safe spaces. "Sinking in" might be equated with "centering," to the extent that Icarus staff have called contributors to reflect deeply on white privilege, institutional oppression, ways to welcome people of color. Still, as this chapter indicates, the way "centering" or creating safe spaces has been operationalized might reinforce static views of selfhood, identity, and community and might serve as a gloss for the securitization of TIP in all iterations.

K, writing before the effects of TIP's new directions came into light, makes a strong case for "sinking in" and embracing the aspects of madness that allows space to hold:

> I think 'sinking in', in a madness-oriented sense, means not trying to convince anyone that it's ok to be mad, or that there are benefits to extreme states. Sinking in means not focusing on being 'a good person'. Sinking in is a willingness to be a bad person who does good things, in the knowledge that this will leave one largely unredeemed in the eyes of many other people. Sinking in is using the difficult perceptions one faces for one's own ends and sense of goodness, because it is useful to be bad sometimes.
>
> I don't have any practical suggestions for how this could work for Icarus as a whole, except for working to make space that doesn't need to be kept or claimed or earned, where badness can happen without the expectation that one will eventually 'get better' or understand the politics or have the right words to say. To make a space but not to hold onto it, in the knowledge that another space can always be made elsewhere. To make a space that is not a thing. Not 'holding space', but letting space hold. And not to require any piece of space in particular. (K., e-mail message to author, November 20, 2014)

This is not to say that the "badness" of racism should be accepted; nor should we embrace the rhetoric of resilience which holds that things will "get better" towards some utopic end. However, "sinking in" could means a different conception of time and space as ever-present and unfolding. Without a telos, beyond good and evil, the project of making "space that doesn't need to be kept or claimed or earned" looks something very different than the safe space in TIP's current direction.

## Discussion

Perhaps my rendering of The Icarus Project's haphazard development can be seen as a tedious academic exercise—one in which it is easy to find faults or limitations within a group struggling for its own continued existence, especially when a friend is not suicidal or involuntarily committed in a psychiatric ward. And yet, because people are in dire need of mutual aid and peer support, because the stakes are all-too-often life and death, when whole populations continue to suffer from the effects of racism, sexism, ableism, queer and transphobia, and other forms of xenophobia, we must grapple with uncomfortable questions that the instability of digital spheres and calls for safe space and resilience pose. What would it mean to trust Icarus contributors and local leadership? What are the ethics of taking a moral stance towards the imposition of a kind of inclusivity that may lead to further division among its membership? And given the organization's fraught past with imbalanced representation of white staff members and problematic gender dynamics, what would it mean for Icarus contributors who have felt slighted by staff members to regain trust in the national organization?

Moreover, how are we to make sense of the group's dynamism and continual (re)formation? Should we view TIP as a delicate daffodil that emerged through the cracks of a crumbling sidewalk at a unique moment and is now gradually wilting in the heat of the sun?[349] And should we see those that left the organization as flourishing seeds that have blown away from the dandelion in a line of flight, even when the circumstances in which they left were less than ideal? Have the challenges the organization faced been a product of an attempt to technologize idea(l)s that do not inherently work well in praxis? Or are the methods they attempted in collective organizing, open source coding, two-directional website design, financial transparency, and other forms of accountability too

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[349] Bradley Lewis, conversation with author, March 17, 2015.

difficult to achieve in a highly individualistic, capitalist society? Are they too idealistic given current standards and models in nonprofit organizing?

While many of the questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation, TIP's inventiveness within its organization's history can be situated within the theoretical framework previously outlined. From such a vantage, we can see TIP as emerging out of necessity by trial-and-error and as a radical envisioning of the world that could be. In TIP's ebbs and flows, we can see how contingent its flourishing is upon funding sources, strong leadership, and the technology which give it shape and form. Yet when its wings have been built and rebuilt on instable codes, servers, and corporate spaces (like MySpace and Facebook), and bound together by a rotating cast of staff members and web developers who try to keep the organization above troubled waters, it is hard—at times— not to imagine that the organization will meet a similar end to the boy after which it was named. Yet even in his memory, the myth lives on, and in TIP's many outcroppings and tangential creations perhaps its idea(l)s will likewise linger, even while aspects of the organization will never be regained.[350]

Because of its many iterations and outcroppings in local chapters and digital spheres, the scope of such an amorphous organization can only be glimpse through schizoanalytic techniques of following its many roots systems, connections, and transformations over time. In its (re)formations, we can begin to see the vast number ways TIP has co-evolved with the technologies it uses. Throughout its technogenic struggles in shifting from propriety coding to open source coding to updating their content management platforms, the exact history through which current dimensions have formed remain rather elusive. And as I have built this chapter upon multi-mediated data from social media and other spaces of circumspect memories (both digital and human), I

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[350] Such loss includes old versions of TIP's website,  MySpace postings, TIP blogs, Facebook discussions long buried in the group's rapidly expanding archive, and the lives of contributors who committed suicide.

make no illusions that what I have gathered of TIP's past is itself fragmented, impartial, and ephemeral in its nature.

Nevertheless, from what data I have gathered, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the ways contributors' environ(mental) niches shape and have been shaped by the organization and its digital spheres. First, the overwhelming negative response to the unannounced shutdown of TIP's forums on February 8, 2015, indicates the valued role the space has among those who still use it and the ways that space extended individuals' emotional states beyond themselves. Through discussions online and feedback from others with diverse mental states, TIP contributors learn about themselves and others; and in their recognition for how their words can affect others, they offer encouragement, advice, and other and mutual aid to their peers. Within the emotional weightiness of such conversations, they come into being through relationship with others' stories and engagements online. In short, they become posthuman. And as the popularity of socially mediated technologies such as Facebook rises, the technology offered on those spaces helps to structure faster paced, crowd-sourced model of peer support and shifts the kind of emotional ecologies that can be formed online.

As we will see in the next chapter, technology does not always led itself to mutual aid, and on the various spaces which TIP has inhabited, many contributors have felt the effects of others' madness enacted against them. In the attempt to create safe space, or shore up against the potential for emotional ecologies to turn sour, become hurtful or vindictive in nature, and/or perpetuate racism and other forms of oppressive speech, TIP staff and volunteer moderators have tried to mitigate the outbursts and vitriol of their contributors by solving conflict privately, calling out violent speech publically, and banning certain contributors from participation. In within the endeavor to foster anti-oppressive spaces, the organization sought to show no lenience for racist beliefs and to alter its demographics by encouraging diverse groups to participate in its discussions. However, in trying to drastically reshape its emotional ecologies and introduce rapid

change within local chapters and digital spheres, the decolonization efforts brought about confusion, dissolution of former affiliations with TIP, and a great deal of conversation about the shifting stance towards more authoritative forms of leadership. While some felt recognized and supported in this shift, others felt shamed, unable to speak, or censored entirely. Regardless, the great turbulence as a national staff attempted a far-reaching alteration indicates that precarious nature that can so quickly cause its contributors to leave or start offshoots of the organization on their own.

Throughout the ebbs and flows of the organization and its changes in leadership structure, national staff members find the pressures of capitalism and the vicissitudes of their mental states difficult to mitigate. Because many periods of organizational disintegration have all-too-often paralleled the tenuous mental states of its leaders and unreliable support from donors, the barebones staff have learned to prepare for economic scarcity and mental hardship within TIP's emotional ecology by taking risk and peril as a given within their leadership structure. Yet in planning for the worst, managing how certain topics can be discussed in public forums, and deciding what rationalities can be tolerated, the staff also risks the possibility of "civilizing" that which makes the project uncivilized and maddening by its very nature.

## Conclusion

In 2012, long-term Icarus member Maryse Mitchell-Brody wrote a piece for TIP about her involvement in Occupy Wall Street as a radical mental health activist and as a NYC Icarus group volunteer.[351] In this essay, she lays out the tensions of community organizing in Occupy as in TIP, and in her words, we can see the parallels between past and current struggles to balance diverse mental states with shared goals for the future. She explains,

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[351] She is also a former partner to Sascha DuBrul.

We all struggled with what we struggled with in Icarus, with what I believe is at the crux of the big questions about radical mental health and building healthy, safe communities: how do we care for and support each other's self-determination in all of our glorious emotional diversity, and still also hold each other accountable towards a collective vision of a more liberated, just world?...There is, of course, no prescription for how to get it right. It's a tightrope walk for which we haven't been trained. But it's a vital balancing act to strive for as we work towards well-being for our communities and ourselves. It's a challenging task, but one I know our communities have the power to rise up and through. Deep inside us we hold the knowledge of how to hold each other with love and accountability—we just need to be willing to take the risk of unlearning the ways we hold ourselves apart from one another.[352]

And TIP transitions away from its co-founders' leadership to a new generation of national organizers, the ways in which accountability will be fully operationalized and enacted remain to be seen.[353] In light of TIP's permutations, and instability, I wonder what it might mean as an organization to value initiatives towards inclusivity and safety, without claiming that there is only one particular way to do so? How can local knowledge and resourcefulness be valued alongside calls for further accountability and self-determination?[354]

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[352] Maryse Mitchell-Brody, "Balancing Acts."

[353] While I was visiting NYC for the month of March, Sascha DuBrul resigned from his position in the National Organizing Collective as Metaphor Crafter, a role that he has held off and on for over 12 years. During the same month, the national organization hired Maryse Mitchell-Brody to write grants, contribute to other fundraising efforts, and prevent the organization from running out of funding this summer; and in this role, she will once again face the many challenges she articulated in her reflections on community organizing. As of May 2015, with the termination of Capistrano's role as local support group coordinator, current staff have informed me that they will continue similar endeavors to decolonize, in a less strident manner and with a much longer timeframe for accomplishing cultural change. Because the forums, local groups, and Facebook discussion group, all face unique challenges and have very different leadership structures, the manner in which issues of institutional racism and other forms of oppression are approached may take on distinctive dimensions with sensitivity to the medium of communication itself.

[354] Colonization and decolonization both require space—to territorialize, to retreat, and to defend. Yet what would it mean to call for something altogether different—a welcome without demand, an attunement towards the good and bad of madness, and a hospitality to both? In their faith in local wisdom, Evans and Reid suggest that communities' abilities to

What I found most interesting about TIP when I first began learning about it was its experimental qualities—its openness and unpredictability, its diminutions and revitalizations. At the same time, these attributes have also made it incredibly unwieldy and unmanageable, both in local setting and digitally. Yet the implications of creating sustainable structure and more closely aligning with capitalistic agendas to market organizations to granters, news organizations, and their membership base may also come at the cost. And as this iteration of TIP moves towards more regular digital communication with its membership, intensive moderation of digital spaces, structured leadership, and directive programmatic material for local group organizers, critiques of the national organization's direction and the threat of propagating neoliberal imperatives are tempered by the great need for the organization to exist and remain a vital presence in the lives of its membership.

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decide for themselves how best to let space hold,

> …just as we have faith in people's abilities to resist what they find intolerable, we also have faith in local populations' *actually existing resourcefulness*. If oppressed peoples have never required the universal theorist to equip them with the intellectual tools before they feel confident enough to resist, endangered populations do not need some outside intervention before they learn how to deal with the trials and tribulations of daily existence. They have far more knowledge and experience and certainly don't require reminding of the presence of some vaguely looming threat they have already learned to deal with. (See Brad Evans and Julian Reid, *Resilient Life,* 89.)

And as I see TIP's new direction emerge, I wonder how the national organization might situate itself not as a "universal theorist" or linguist on race and inclusivity, but rather as host to usher in such reflexivity?

## Chapter 5: Emotional Ecologies of Mutual Aid: A Case Study of the Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective

> The core purpose of the group has long been to create a space where people can be at ease in speaking about their experiences as human beings with complicated histories, difficult days, and amazing resilience in lives that have been defined and misdefined as being 'mentally ill.' This a difficult purpose, for the very same reasons that it is an important purpose.
>
> People are a mess. Complex and raw and wounded and terrified and swooning sick to even speak. Needs often conflict, and pain knows no boundaries. To hold space for people to speak and be heard and be present with one another as mutual human beings in a fucked up and beautiful world is hard. It takes intention and attention and an enormous amount sensitivity to what is happening in the room and in people's lives.
>
> Many people who have attended the group have experienced incredible harm in social and relational spaces, with other humans. They've been misunderstood, maligned, abused, and dehumanized in their experiences with other people. We are vulnerable.
>
> The concept of holding an open community space for radical mental health support and discussion is beautiful concept. The operationalizing of that concept—that there should be places where people can talk about their experiences with mental health, identity, healing, their struggles, and fucking triumph in staying alive—is challenging and problematic in so many ways.
>
> —Faith Rhyne, unsent e-mail to the ARMHC Google Group, May 18, 2015.

How can I begin to write about my time in Asheville? Just a month out of the "field"—or rather—*that* field, I sit in Grand Central Station at a table in the Dining Concourse, listen to the hum of passersby, and stare at a blank screen on my laptop,

trying to find the words to describe what happened there. The people I met, the paths I hiked, the meals I hosted, and the madness I found in that eccentric mountain town—all seem so distant from the crowds of tourists and locals bustling around me, traveling to their next destination. And yet, through this screen, I still feel tethered to my friends in Asheville. This morning, I woke up to sounds of a passing commuter train, a constant beeping from a nearby building, cars honking in the street, and my phone notifying me of an e-mail thread from attendees of the Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective As I downed my morning coffee, I read along as the chatter trickled into my e-mail inbox.[355] Yesterday, at a little bike shop and coffee house in Brooklyn, I texted and Skyped with a friend from the group.[356] In a geographical sense, I feel worlds away from that town. Still, I am just as connected to them as I ever was when I lived there and perhaps, in some ways, even more so.

This chapter details some of my observations of and engagement with attendees of the ARMHC.[357] I will present local history and politics as they relate to its development, before outlining the history of the ARMHC and weaving together a narrative of my assimilation into the community, analog and digital interactions with individual attendees, and practices in engaged ethnography.[358] In discussing members' attitudes towards the ARMHC, digital modes of communication, and other forms of mutual aid and peer support, I demonstrate the many ways mediated engagement in/form

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[355] Faith Rhyne to ARMHC mailing list, March 10, 2015.

[356] Russell, Skype conversation with author, March 9, 2015.

[357] Hereafter, I will refer to the group as the Collective. Many members have debated the group's name—some take issue with the length of the title, the term "Radical," the phrase "mental health," or the word "Collective." Some stumble over the acronym "ARMHC," while others use phrase "rad mad" to reference the group.

[358] See Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "The Ethics of Engaged Ethnography: Applying a Militant Anthropology in Organs-Trafficking Research," *Anthropology News* (September 2009): 13-14; Kay Warren, Perils and Promises of Engaged Anthropology: Historical Transitions and Ethnographic Dilemmas," in *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy, and Activism*, eds. V. Sanford and A. Angel-Ajani (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 213-227.

environ(mental) niches of contributors to the ARMHC and help to shape emotional ecologies in which the stories shared create a certain weight and depth within the group's understanding of each other. Additionally, digital communication—as a paradoxical space that can bring people together or further alienate them from each other—highly informs the way some ARMHC attendees understand themselves and others; and in describing such interpersonal dynamics online, this chapter points to instances in which research participants cultivate forms of self-expression through social media, while carefully curating their exposure to others. What is more, as those in crisis engage in technogenic processes, they also extend their trouble mental and emotional expression online; and as their affects and perceptions take on a digital life of their own, their posthuman qualities become even more apparent. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on the instability of emotional ecologies in relation to the ARMHC's leadership structure, my early departure from Asheville, and the events leading up to the group's unraveling and hiatus from in-person meetings in the month of April.

## Asheville and the History of the ARMHC

### THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE AS AN EMOTIONAL ECOLOGY

Asheville has long been considered a mecca of health and wellness, for those with the means to access a wealth of recreational sports and nutritious, locally-grown food. In the 1800s, the neighboring town of Hot Springs marketed its natural springs to New Englanders in search of good air and a warm, humid climate to heal their tuberculosis. Asheville became a key trading post and tourist attraction as the railway industry grew. To construct what has been called the "American Palace of Versailles," in the 1880s the Vanderbilt family displaced the Shiloh community, a town of free blacks, many of whom

worked on the construction of the estate.[359] In 1895, the affluent family completed the construction of Biltmore Estates as a refuge from the business of big city life and invited their guests for seasonal stays at their property, which overlooked the Blue Ridge Mountains.[360] Asheville's long history of racial segregation was made even more apparent from the 1950s through the 1970s with urban renewal campaigns, which raised the property tax for houses in the city and displaced Blacks whose families had passed down old Victorian homes for several generations.[361]

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Asheville's downtown revitalization project was further segregated on racial and economic lines as the city catered to a tourist industry of those in search of hiking, mountain arts and crafts, alternative healing modalities,[362] craft beers from microbreweries, music festivals, whitewater recreation, farm-to-table restaurants, and local boutiques. During the last twenty years, the city doubled in population as affluent whites moved to the city for its recreational opportunities. Similarly, the West Asheville area, where I lived during my fieldwork, had undergone rapid gentrification and population boom, and the majority of blacks—with the exception of those in public housing—were pushed out due to the high cost of living. Racial relations are most frequently discussed at public events in terms of tensions between white and black demographics, and Native Americans and Latino groups who live largely outside of the city in the surrounding towns make up a fairly small percentage of the

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359 "The Shiloh Community Association," *Mountain Xpres*s, July 2, 2008, accessed March 11, 2015. https://mountainx.com/news/070208spotlight/.

360 "Estate History," Biltmore, accessed March 11, 2015. http://www.biltmore.com/visit/biltmore-house-gardens/estate-history.

361 David Forbes, "Red Lines," *The Asheville Blade*, July 22, 2014, accessed March 11, 2015. http://ashevilleblade.com/?p=241.

362 Such as yoga, meditation, acupuncture, reiki, past life regression, hypnosis, neurofeedback, herbal remedies, nutritional supplements, cellular healing, and shamanic healing practices.

population.[363] The black community has long felt the effects of police corruption and racism, and for these reasons, many have felt disenfranchised and alienated from the city's leadership and their plans for further urban development.[364]

Because tourism drives much of the local economy, many service industry jobs are widely held by college-educated young adults, who have stayed in the city for the lifestyle. Buncombe County Public Schools, Mission Health System and Hospital, Veterans Affairs Medical Center-Asheville Department, The Biltmore Company, University of North Carolina-Asheville, Asheville-Buncombe Community College, The Omni Grove Park Inn, the City of Asheville make up some of the top employers in the city.[365] However, due the city's skewed demographic of overqualified young adults and few professional-level jobs, there are to be had, many of those working in the service industry struggle with low wages, few benefits, and expensive housing.[366] Efforts to unionize have gained traction over the last couple years, but the city has yet to implement measures to protect its workers from exploitative employment.[367]

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[363] Anecdotally, I was often read as being Native American among many in the homeless population, since my features most closely aligned with those in the neighboring town of Cherokee.

[364] Jon Ostendorff, "Police: No Confidence in Leaders," *Citizen Times*, October 17, 2014, accessed March 11, 2015, http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2014/10/16/police-confidence-department-leaders/17370383.; Beth Walton, "Hundreds Protest Ferguson Verdict in Asheville," *Citizen Times*, November 25, 2014, accessed March 11, 2015http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2014/11/25/hundreds-protest-ferguson-verdict-asheville/70123414/.; David Forbes, "Democracy and Consequences," *The Asheville Blade*, February 11, 2015, accessed March 11, 2015. http://ashevilleblade.com/?p=877.

[365] "Major Employers: Buncombe County Employers (200+ Employees)," Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, updated April 2014, accessed March 11, 2015. http://www.ashevillechamber.org/sites/default/files/EDC-FS-MajorEmployers-04-14_0.pdf.

[366] David Forbes, "Educated, High Rent, Low Pay: An Economic Snapshot of Buncombe," *Mountain Xpress*, March 12, 2012, accessed March 11, 2015. https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/educated_high_rent_low_pay_economic_snapshot_of_buncombe/.

[367] David Forbes, "Is Asheville the Next Union City?," *The Asheville Blade*, February 20, 2015, accessed March 11, 2015. http://ashevilleblade.com/?p=909.

North Carolina's need for mental health support is great. In 2012, North Carolina de-institutionalized the only state mental hospital and is now experiencing the effects of a poor infrastructure for handling cases of acute mental health crisis. In Raleigh, for example, the state has now contracted with commercial psychiatric facilities such as WakeMed Hospital to help clear psychiatric patients out of emergency departments and provide them with more specialized care.[368] Now, in Asheville, a similar center is being developed to assist with mental crisis and issues related to drug addiction.[369] While the state's Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services does provide resources for certain forms of peer-to-peer support for mental health, certified peer support specialists are trained to encourage those with mental distress to continue medically sanctioned treatment options; and conversations about exploring alternative treatments, tapering off certain psycho-pharmaceuticals, or taking divergent ontological stances towards mental distress are limited, and, in many instances, are discouraged.[370] Furthermore, the state's failure to expand Medicare and Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act also meant that access to mental health care would remain limited for those who could not afford to pay out of pocket.[371] What is more, for those who do qualify for disability but are not able to participate in group therapy (among other

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[368] Julie Creswell, "E.R. Costs for Mentally Ill Soar, and Hospitals Seek Better Way," *The New York Times*, December 25, 2013, accessed February 14, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/26/health/er-costs-for-mentally-ill-soar-and-hospitals-seek-better-way.html?_r=0.

[369] Liv Osby, "New Asheville Center Aims to Keep Mentally Ill Patients Out of ER," *Citizen-Times*, March 5, 2015, accessed March 11, 2015. http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2015/03/05/new-asheville-center-aims-keep-mentally-patients-er/24459653/.

[370] See "North Carolina's Peer Support Specialist Program," *Behavioral Healthcare Resource Program*, accessed February 23, 2014. http://pss-sowo.unc.edu/.

[371] Mark A. Hall, "States' Decision Not to Expand Medicaid," *North Carolina Law Review*, July 2014, accessed March 11, 2015. http://www.nclawreview.org/2014/07/states-decision-not-to-expand-medicaid/.

requirements) that would make them eligible to consult with a psychiatrist, they remain stuck within a social service loophole and often go untreated.[372] And with a dearth of sliding-scale payment options for traditional mental health care treatment, communal approaches like the ARMHC's became not just an alternative to mental health treatment, but in some cases, the only form of therapeutic intervention available for those who do not qualify for disability yet cannot afford private mental health care.

Such geographic and demographic factors within Asheville's evolution contributed greatly to the environ(mental) niche of the city, as a haven for tourists, but a difficult economic climate for the ARMHC's white, liberal, low-income demographic. Attendees of the group have ranged from people in their mid-twenties to late sixties, with most falling into the 30-50s age range. Many of people in the ARMHC receive disability support, and of those who are employed, most work part-time in service-industry jobs. Not only is it difficult to find full-time work in Asheville, but many ARMHC attendees find full-time work to be too mentally taxing for them to sustain for more than a few months. Most regular attendees have graduated high school, some hold associate-level degrees, a couple hold bachelor-level degrees, and two have a master's. Access to transportation varies significantly—the majority of ARMHC attendees have cars, while the rest use the bus system or bikes to navigate the city. That being said, the transience of those who come to Asheville parallels the transience of those who come and go from the ARMHC, and for this reason, describing the size, tenor, and demographics of attendees as a "fact" is a somewhat futile endeavor.

**ARMHC's History from 2005-2015**

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[372] Ed (mentioned later in the chapter) found himself in this position for over a year, while living in Asheville. Because he found group therapy to be stressful and "triggering" for him, he could not go through the normal channels provided by social services to receive a consultation with a psychiatrist.

The ARMHC's history can be divided into two parts with the ebb and flow of one group from 2005 to 2011 and a new wave of organizing from 2012 to 2015. I found the former group's history challenging to piece together in part because of the low level of involvement past organizers have had in the current iteration of the ARMHC, feelings of discomfort surrounding the group's disbanding, rather awkward interpersonal dynamics I had with a couple contributors to the original group, and my inability to access the Yahoo group, their primary organizing tool (which itself suffered from data loss and the deletion of key archival material).[373] For this reason, I present a general overview of the ARMHC's beginnings, before describing the more recent wave of organizing.

Having recently moved to Asheville in the fall of 2005, Molly Spregelmeyer found a dearth of local support services for alternative approaches to mental states. Within a few weeks of her arrival, she posted an announcement online on Craigslist.com to form an interest group on topics related to madness. Spregelmeyer recruited a couple core contributors online and through word of mouth. Together, they organized the ARMHC. [374]

The ARMHC brought with it a number of perspectives—those who aligned themselves with radical organizations such as MindFreedom International, those who wanted to explore a number of alternative modalities and wellness practices, those who were on psycho-pharmaceutical medications, those who considered themselves to be mad allies, etc. The group sought to be an inclusive space for alternative orientations towards mental health—anti-capitalist, holistic, anarchist perspectives, etc.—not heard within

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[373] I later learned the Yahoo group suffered from significant data loss due to a disgruntled facilitator's deletion of key documents.

[374] Molly Sprengelmeyer, interview by Will Hall, *Madness Radio: Voices and Visions from outside Mental Health*. Pacifica Radio WXOJLP FM 103.3, November 7, 2007. Note: This episode removed from the madnessradio.net website at Molly Sprengelmeyer's request.

traditional support groups; and in an attempt to preserve such diversity of standpoints, the ARMHC did not name itself an Icarus Project chapter as such.

Nevertheless, the ARMHC did have a significant affiliation with TIP. In addition to using Icarus language in the initial Craigslist advertisement that brought the core group together, ARMHC attendees used similar language and principals of mutual aid and consensus-based organizing. In 2007, an attendee led a six-week series discussion group on TIP publication *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness: A Roadmap into Bipolar Worlds*.[375] From 2008-2010, during a lull in national organizing, Sprengelmeyer worked with TIP as a local support group coordinator and in many other capacities as a grassroots organizer; and she regularly updated the group about the national organization's upcoming events. Like most Icarus-affiliated groups, the ARMHC had a substantial amount of autonomy from TIP, and while every few years the group sent in short reports about their activities to the national organization, ARMHC remained largely independent from their reach.

During this time, meetings were held on Monday nights from 6-8pm. The meeting agenda from 2005-2010 began with announcements then transitioned into support and sharing, in which a discussion evolved on whatever the facilitator saw as a hot topic or theme that came up while attendees talked about their lives. As the formal meeting would end, those who were interested would stay to for a "Housekeeping" meeting to help with planning, organizing, and other housekeeping matters. The number of participants ranged anywhere from six to twenty attendees at the height of the ARMHC's popularity.

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[375] Commonly, this publication, referred to as the Icarus Reader, contains a collection of writings from contributors to the online forums on madness and self-care practices. See The Icarus Project, *Navigating the Space.*

In the fall of 2006, one year after the founding of the ARMHC, the group

grappled with the death of a co-founder.[376] The ARMHC's loss became a catalyst for

further introspection on the group's mission and vision; and recognizing the real need for

a stronger mutual aid support network to provide a safe space for attendees to share their

emotions and reckon with mental suffering in their community, the group formed a

mutual aid support call list, so that attendees who needed to connect with someone had a

list of phone numbers and e-mail addresses they could contact until they reached

someone who would listen to them. Attendees disseminated this list to new attendees at

their meetings and highlighted to people on the list who were in attendance.

On occasion, the group organized Mad Movie events in which attendees watched

documentary and fictional films on topics related to madness. They also supported

breakout groups, including a book club and a sister organization for teenagers with

mental diagnoses who met regularly for a number of months.[377] Workshops with

Playback Theatre of Asheville helped facilitate conversation about relationships between

mental health service providers and ARMHC attendees as patients or clients.[378] While

these ventures did not have as much staying power as the weekly support meetings, they

exemplified the great interest generated around the group and a willingness of attendees

to help organize and support events.

**ARMHC's Spheres from 2005-2011**

A Riseup listserv, commonly used by many anarchist collectives and organizers

from TIP, first provided a space for local organizing through digital communication.

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[376] "Ronald Jones (33) passed away from an accidental drug overdose," *MyDeathSpace.com*, December 3, 2007, accessed August 21, 2014. http://mydeathspace.com/article/2007/12/03/Ronald_Jones_(33)_passed_away_from_an_acci dental_drug_overdose.

[377] Undergraduate students at Warren Wilson College briefly formed an Icarus chapter in the neighboring town of Black Mountain.

[378] Molly Sprengelmeyer to ARMHC mailing list, April 10, 2015.

After the departure of an organizer involved with maintaining Riseup communication, the Yahoo group came into being as an online space that archived articles and stored other information for the group, listed related events, and provided a forum for people to discuss issues related to mental health and receive feedback between group meetings. Although some attendees of the ARMHC were initially resistant to the idea of establishing a Yahoo group (because of its corporate affiliations), soon the digital space proved an invaluable tool to communicate with attendees in one online space and to organize events.[379] Two moderators were responsible for moderating comments on the Yahoo group on a regular basis, responding to queries, maintaining update contact information, and posting information about the group meetings.[380] On March 20, 2011, as the new organizers came into leadership roles within the ARMHC, a attendee created a Facebook group for communication, which remains in use to this day.[381]

The physical location of the weekly meeting space moved several times since the ARMHC's founding; and in doing so, the group shifted and broadened its demographics. When it began in 2005, the ARMHC met in the Asheville Community Recreational Center, a hub for young, (mostly) white anarchists. When that space was no longer available, they then met for several months in Ashton Park.[382] This public space attracted a number of people experiencing houselessness, those who were released recently from jail, and the occasional environmentalist (who confused their group for Earth First!, a

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[379] At broader level, one criticism of The Icarus Project throughout its existence has been the large number of platforms it has created in its attempt to communicate with members—including a website, Facebook groups (one closed group and one open group), the online forum, a number of related blogs and articles written by Icarus members and affiliated scholars, a websites and Facebook group created by local group organizers.

[380] The Yahoo group waned in use as the group shifted leadership in late 2010. And at one of the organizing meeting at Firestorm in Spring 2011, members decided to leave the Yahoo group as is to archive the past several years of the Collective.

[381] Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective's Facebook group, accessed May 9, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/groups/197153303650300/.

[382] Located at the intersection of Hilliard Ave and S French Broad Ave.

radical conservationist group that also met at the park during the same time). Following a few months at the park, the ARMHC found residence at the local YWCA.[383] There, they rented a space on Mondays during the late afternoon—their regular meeting time—and attracted those of different abilities and greater age ranges.

At that point, the group had held the record for the longest regularly meeting group affiliated with TIP, but after five years, the group ended their last meeting at the YWCA in October 2010 and began the process of disbanding, even while new organizers attempted to revitalize the group. Challenges arose with a change in leadership, facilitation, and organizing roles; and the plan after meetings ended at the YWCA was for the group to continue on with support from new attendees. The ARMHC's Facebook page documents a number of organizing meetings at Firestorm Café & Books, a worker-owned anarchist hub in downtown Asheville.[384]

During the spring and through the summer of 2011, the group struggled with trying to find a space to meet regularly to host the support group. A few attempts were made to hold the traditional Monday night support group outdoors at Montford Park,[385] but soon attendees resolved to put those meetings on hold until a stable indoor space could be found. Initial inquiries to a number of facilities were unsuccessful, and attendees at the time felt that renting a space for weekly meetings seemed cost prohibitive. During this time, miscommunication between older attendees of the ARMHC and newer ones led to a crisis in leadership and direction. Notes from a facilitation meeting read as follows:

> Feedback from new folks in our Collective boils down to miscommunication between older & newer members. New members were led to believe that the Collective was just now Being Organized. Older members thought the person who set up the 02-21-11 & 03-07-11 meetings would be following up with the new folks and giving them the information necessary to safely and effectively run

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[383] Located on 185 S French Broad Ave.

[384] Formerly located on 48 Commerce Street. Closed March 1, 2014.

[385] 345 Montford Ave.

support group meetings, how to communicate with other ARMHC members, our group definition and rules, etc. The end result of this lack of communication was frustration for everyone: New folks trying to organize ARMHC as if it were a brand new group were dismayed to learn that everything had been set up for years & only needed to be implemented. Elder members were upset to learn that there had been NO follow up with the new folks after the 03-07-11 meeting & the new folks had been forced to work blindfolded. There were no hard feelings between the elder & newer members. It was resolved that no new ARMHC meetings would be set up WITHOUT proper preparation.[386]

After notes from that group meeting in June were posted, monthly organizing meetings were organized through the month of September, but only the organizer attended. September 2011 marked the last organizing meeting for the ARMHC.

### ARMHC's History from 2012-2015

In 2009, Faith Rhyne stumbled across TIP's website while at her workplace and read about its mission and vision. However, it was several months later, during what she calls a "profound life-altering crisis" that she started participating in the Icarus online forums; and in the fall of 2010, she sought out the ARMHC in Asheville at their meetings at YWCA. Unable attend the Monday support group meetings that fall, she participated in a few organizing and facilitation events when she could, but as the group itself met more and more infrequently, she also drifted away from the group for some time.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Occupy Wall Street Movement in the fall of 2011 acted as a catalyst to further raise awareness on radical mental health both locally in Asheville and at a national scale. Locally, the liberal city of Asheville also saw a great insurgence of political activism. Ashevillians set up tents in Pack Square downtown, and

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[386] Facebook, Inc. "Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective's Facebook Page," June 9, 2011, accessed March 14, 2015.
https://www.facebook.com/groups/197153303650300/permalink/216212101744420/.

groups mobilized to protest a range of issues affecting North Carolina.[387] Describing the

confluence of events that happened during the Occupy movement, Rhyne recounted in an

interview,

> In 2010, I was sitting alone in my house, strategizing a global revolution, incredibly engaged with this idea of a mass uprising base around—basically dismantling capitalism and colonialism and the legacies of those economic models and some of the cultural underpinnings of them. And then the following year, after I … had gotten off of meds… I was like—"Oh look, there is a global revolution. Imagine that!"… Clearly, I had to be a part of this. So [I] ended up getting involved in local activism scenes through Occupy and got a crash course in organizing—what doesn't work and how you put up with horrible meeting process…[388]

Although Rhyne had worked in and volunteered with social services organizations and

related nonprofit organizations throughout her career, she herself had not taken on

leadership responsibilities within such activist groups until this point. However, through

coordinating Occupy events, she learned about the challenges of communicating

effectively with fellow activists, worked with many of the organizations making up c/s/x

movements, and became more radicalized herself from these interactions.

Despite the lack of a local group in Asheville, Rhyne learned a great deal about

mad organizing through participating on TIP online forums, blogging on

MadinAmerica.com,[389] talking with TIP co-founders Jacks McNamara and Sascha

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[387] David Forbes, "Occupy Asheville Camp Cleared, Three Arrested," Mountain Xpress, February 18, 2012, accessed March 13, 2015. https://mountainx.com/news/community-news/occupy_asheville_camp_cleared_three_arrested/.

[388] Faith Rhyne, interview with author, July 29, 2014.

[389] Robert Whitaker's book by the same name served as a touchstone for many radical mental health activists and became a popularly-cited source to reference the potentially harmful side effects of psychopharmaceuticals, the co-evolution of APA/DSM diagnostic categories and Big Pharma, and the consequences of mass marketing such drugs. The MadinAmerica.com website serves as a hub for allied bloggers, scholars, and activists

DuBrul,[390] and protesting at the Occupy APA (American Psychiatric Association) conference in Philadelphia.[391] In the fall of 2012, she attended a retreat at Esalen in Big Sur, California with a number of leaders from c/s/x movements. From that experience and among others, Faith become increasingly more involved with TIP and volunteering with the organization. When Jacks and Sascha received funding in 2012 to restart the organization, Faith initially resisted payment for her services for a number of months, then eventually joined the staff when forum moderators were offered some compensation for their work. As a third staff person, Faith helped take meeting notes, serve as a resource for local group coordinators, and plan Icarus events.[392]

Having contributed to the Mindful Occupation meetings and other events related to radical mental health activism on a national level, Faith saw a real need for an active local group in Asheville. She began posting in the ARMHC's Facebook group about her activities facilitating Mindful Occupation meetings in June 2012 and invited the ARMHC to participate in such events. And in conjunction with Mindful Occupation, Rhyne— along with others' support and mentorship—resurrected the ARMHC on September 11, 2012, a year after the first iteration of the group had disbanded.

In June 2013, almost a year after the ARMHC's revitalization, the death of David, another ARMHC attendee, shook the group tremendously and exposed the limits of peer-to-peer support. When the attendee stopped calling, texting others, and participating in ARMHC meetings, others in the group became concerned. Because they did not have basic contact information collected on many of the ARMHC attendees, they did not know

and provides a number of resources for those interested in learning more about the c/s/x movement.

[390] Rhyne describes her initial contact with McNamara and Dubrul as a part of a conference call on Mindful Occupation facilitated by MindFreedom International.

[391] Occupy APA in Philadelphia occurred on May 5, 2012.

[392] Faith's official role is to serve as the local support groups coordinator who organizes mutual aid calls with other Icarus facilitators to offer advice on meeting structure and recruitment and connect other coordinators together to learn more about other group's policies and agenda items for local meetings.

his last name and had no way of contacting his friends or family attendees, checking in on him at his place of residence, or even finding out about his death until one of them stumbled across his obituary in the local newspaper several days after the fact. He had been in touch with Rhyne in his last days and talked with her about his frustrations interacting with his clinical provider and mistrusted of how the medical system handled his hospitalization and re-entry process. He told her how he wished there would be a peer-run respite center he could go to be around people without fear that they would hospitalize him. And, in response, the group began conversations about how to prevent further suicides, how to defuse support throughout attendees (so as not to burden one attendee solely with another's struggles), and what the group's policies should be towards contacting attendee outside of weekly meetings.

In the wake of David's death, development of Sunrise Peer Support Network, a volunteer service for those with mental struggles, gave some ARMHC attendees who were most affected by his loss an outlet to provide further support to their peers. In August 2014, ARMHC attendee and cofounder of Sunrise Peer Support Kevin Mahoney launched a call line for those in distress to talk to a certified peer support specialist volunteer about their struggles. This "warm" line—as distinguished from a twenty-four hour crisis hotline—provides resources and support without the caller fearing they will be admitted into the hospital for suicidal ideation and other forms of mental suffering. As Sunrise Peer Support expanded, the organization offered peer counseling at Kairos West Community Center, a code purple shelter at SonRise Community Outreach, and a warmline available via phone call.[393]

In addition, ARMHC has partnered with other organizations for other events related to mental health. In March 2014, when I was in Asheville for a site visit to build

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[393] Sunrise Peer Support Volunteer Services, "About Us," accessed March 13, 2015. http://sunriseinasheville.org. Note: A number of Collective members, myself included, have volunteered with Sunrise.

community support for the research project, I attended an event raising awareness about the effects of income inequalities. This dinner, discussion, and art-making event was hosted by ARMHC, Just Economics,[394] and BeLoved House. ARMHC has also participated in Crisis Intervention Team Training events with local sheriffs to discuss their own interactions with law enforcement, best practices for interacting with someone experiencing psychosis, and alternatives to sending a person in crisis either to prison or the hospital.[395] And in May 20th 2014, McNamara and DuBrul visited Asheville and participated in a discussion on radical approaches to mental health and talked about the work they have done to create mutual aid support networks and media reframing mental illness. Partnerships with BeLoved House, Kairos West Community Center, and Sunrise Peer Support also illustrate the inroads ARMHC has made within Asheville to raise awareness locally about alternative ways to understand diverse mental states.

Arguably, ARMHC is as autonomous from TIP as its first iteration had been. Because current attendees do not have strong affiliations with other organizations with alternative perspectives towards madness, Icarus publications now serve as a primary reference for further research on particular queries related to tapering off medication, organizing, facilitating, and creating a safe space for meeting discussions. At meetings, Icarus pamphlets and postcards are set out on a coffee table; and a volunteer reads the meeting agreements out loud (this document on creating non-oppressive space to foster dialogue among participants has been adapted from *Friends Make the Best Medicine*, an Icarus publication on mutual aid support and community organizing). However, most attendees from ARMHC do not participate in TIP online forum or their closed Facebook group; and while TIP website provides ARMHC's contact information and links to their

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394 Just Economics is a local advocacy organization for living wage and improving public transportation in Asheville. See Just Economics, "About Us," accessed May 15, 2015. http://justeconomicswnc.org/what-we-do/.

395 FaithRR, "There Are Times and Places…," March 17, 2014, accessed March 13, 2015. http://proofofgodandothertragedies.net/2014/03/17/there-are-times-and-places/.

WordPress site, affiliation with the national organization remains tenable for reasons I will discuss later.

In my attendance of the current iteration of ARMHC (2012—present), that meeting structure remains quite similar to its predecessor's agenda. At the beginning of the meeting, people make announcements about upcoming events, followed by a "check-in" in which attendees discuss their moods, life events, or other issues related to their mental states. Attendees are asked not to give feedback to a person who check-in, unless they request permission. After everyone who wants to share has "checked-in" with the group, the facilitator asks if there is anything that attendees want to spend some time discussing, or—if there is pre-determined topic for the week—people begin talking about that. The number of participants range anywhere from five to twelve attendees at a meeting. Organizing and facilitation meetings are generally held on Friday afternoons and are set up irregularly when facilitators feel able to plan a meeting and discuss issues need to be addressed within the group.

### ARMHC'S SPHERES FROM 2012-2015

This iteration of ARMHC began regular meetings on Tuesday in a backroom at The Downtown Market in September 2012.[396] In April 2013, ARMHC hosted Madlands!, an art exhibit at Firestorm Café, a cooperative collective-owned coffee shop that had served as a community space for several radical local groups. Later in the month, ARMHC hosted a workshop and poetry reading with Jacks McNamara at the same location.[397] Due to new policies following a change in the store's management, in May 2013 they moved to Wall Street Coffee House and Emporium,[398] a café which was also

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[396] Located on 45 South French Broad Avenue.

[397] Both events served to bring in many new members interested in joining the Collective; and the next few meetings saw a large increase in attendance.

[398] Formerly located on 62 Wall Street.

located in the downtown area. Later that year in November, they moved once again to same owner's new downtown location at Eagle Street Coffee House and Emporium.[399] There, in the summer, they hosted a Crisis Intervention Training workshop for local police officers to learn more about the group and discuss ways to ways to approach those undergoing mental suffering to prevent their incarceration. In October, ARMHC hosted an art show at the coffee shop featuring local artists with sensitivities along with an art workshop a couple weeks later. For reasons I will discuss later, on November 4, 2014, ARMHC once again moved to Kairos West Community Center, where it held regular support meetings until the group's hiatus in March 2015.[400]

ARMHC has a large plastic storage box that contains old flyers and posters from past events, meeting agreements, flyers about TIP, the 'zine *Friends Make the Best Medicine*, pens and other office supplies, a box of tissues, a clipboard, donations in the form of change for buying coffee for those who could not afford to spend money at the café, worksheets on creating wellness plans (known as Mad Maps), blank pages for sketching during meetings, and other paper supplies. Soon after I arrived, a few core contributors to the group went through the box, sorting and cleaning out old material.[401] When new attendees making inquiries about ARMHC's procedures are often referred to the box, which is seen as a rather informal library for learning more about the group's operations.

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[399] Located on 39 South Market Street. Due to low business, this coffee shop closed down in February 2015.

[400] During the spring of 2014, there had been some discussion of moving locations to Be Loved House, a community center for people near houselessness. Such a move would have opened up the Collective for the working poor, the houseless, and those near houselessness. Because Be Loved was undergoing a transition within their space during the time that the Collective needed to decide about a new meeting location in October 2014, the community center was not a viable option for regular Collective meetings. See Be Loved House, "An Intentional Community Plotting Goodness and Putting Love into Action," accessed August 21, 2014. http://belovedhouse.webs.com.

[401] Field notes from July 18, 2014 at Eagle Street Coffee Shop and Emporium.

ARMHC's digital spheres include a Google Group, a WordPress website, and a phone number list. New contributors to ARMHC set up a Google Group in January 2013. Since then, the Google Group has been used to send out notes and meeting reminders to attendees. Over the course of several months, as they became more accustomed to contributing to ARMHC through this medium, the Google Group has become a more casual space to post their own thoughts, share art (including poetry, photographs, videos, and music), pose questions to the group, provide support, and contribute to conversations that would then feed back into the in-person meetings. Among other issues, discussion threads have included topics related to event planning, organizing capacity, updates about this research project, gender dynamics, listening spaces, and announcements about local events around Asheville. In addition, Google Docs provided another space for storing documents and for collaborating on their creation.

In February 2013, Rhyne created a WordPress website for ARMHC as well. The site serves as another platform for sharing announcements and upcoming events in a more public setting, since both the Google Group of ~30 members and the Facebook group of ~90 members are closed groups. Rhyne moderates the website and gave me administrator privileges in July 2014, so that I could re-blog articles from my WordPress site on the group page.[402] ARMHC's WordPress site is updated regularly, as are the Google Groups and the Facebook group, making it the third online platform for those interested to stay abreast on the organization's activities.

Lastly, on December 2, 2014, following the tradition of the first ARMHC's phone list, ARMHC once again compiled and published a list of regular attendees' phone numbers and e-mail addresses. This list, made available to members of the Google Group and the Facebook group, also included volunteers' preferred mode of communication and

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[402] See "Homepage,"*Asheville Radical Mental Health Collective*, accessed June 9, 2015. http://ashevilleradicalmentalhealth.net and Erica Fletcher, "Homepage," *Erica Fletcher* accessed June 9, 2015. https://ericafletcher.wordpress.com.

availability. Many people who signed up for the list already had each others' phone numbers, but they agreed that the list would be a sign of solidarity and reassurance, in case of times of crisis. Some felt that they needed to explain why they did not sign up for the list (due to few minutes on their cellular plan, lack of emotional availability, difficult mental states, etc.); and even passing around a sign-up sheet brought up boundaries issues, concerns of being inundated with phone calls, and worries that they might not be able to provide the support that the person calling might require. While the list is posted on Facebook and through the Google Group, it is not readily available, since it was only posted once and has since been "buried" in the stream of other Facebook posts and Google Group conversations. In my experience being in ARMHC, by the time people who called me for support, they had my phone number for quite some time; and those who asked me for others' phone numbers did so via text before consulting the phone list.

## Beginnings

A few days before my move to Asheville, I started receiving e-mails from an ARMHC attendee who—after reading my dissertation proposal and finding it rather inaccessible—questioned my intent in conducting the study. As I mentioned in the theory chapter, he worried about issues of surveillance, data mining, and website activity analysis; and during trouble points of his life, he felt that his online activity was being watched, that evil forces were sending him cryptic messages through online advertisements and other messages, and that his movements were being followed and simultaneously directed. I later learned from him that because he experienced such issues with paranoia, he had a hard time with newcomers to the group. Still, in the days leading up to my move to Asheville in July 2014, I wondered anxiously if I was asking too much for people to share their lives with me; and I wondered how long I would have to justify my presence to individuals in the group and to build more trusting relationships.

## ACCLIMATING TO LIFE IN ASHEVILLE

Having lived in Texas within a fifty-mile radius of my family and friends for most of my life, I was not that accustomed with moving to a new location and forming entirely new friendships and relationships. And in the first couple months of feeling rather lonely and uprooted, I found myself finding solace in nature and a new way of engaging with the outdoor world. I soon became enamored with living in the shelter of the mountains and started exploring the many hiking paths along the Blue Ridge Parkway during the summer months. Through reading works in cultural ecology, anarcho-primitivism, and conservation movements, I found that Appalachia, with its incredible biodiversity and history, appealed to me on an intellectual level as well. And as I settled into a house that I shared with my landlord and a couple roommates, I read about the indigenous populations who were displaced from the area, the history of the city, and made terrariums from jars I found at thrift shops and moss I picked up on walks in the forest. In the summer months, I picked wild blackberries and blueberries from bushes, laid out in the sunlight, listen to gurgles of the Chattering Children (the tributaries that feed into the French Broad River), smell the rich, humid air on wet earth, tubed down the clear waters of the Tow River, and pet the lush moss and lichens that sprouts on rocks and trees.

Within the liberal culture of Asheville, I found that one of the many quirks of the city is how enamored its inhabitants are by alternative health modalities, mindfulness practices, liberal attitudes, and spiritual practices.[403] From meditating in salt caves to eating locally grown, organic foods to becoming versed in Ayurvedic medicine to

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[403] Spiritual expression could be found in the plethora of Baptist churches across the city and in Wiccan coven gatherings, Fairie circles, neopagan ceremonies, ecstatic dance, Hindu pujas, and Buddhist meetings.[403] Young hipsters and those with low income wearclothes from thrift shops alike, and aesthetic choices in the name of conserving resources or recycling often resulted in vintage-looking, sartorial choices. Other fairly accepted practices included public interest groups for those engaged in polyamory, platonic cuddling, sensuous petting, etc.

protesting vaccinations to drinking calming Kava root to cultivating unique probiotic kefir strands, alternative practices in the name of health and wellness were held generally in high esteem. Because of Ashevillians' openness to alternative health practices, ARMHC does not seem too out of the ordinary, in terms of the prevailing ethos of disillusionment towards or critical engagement with many aspects of Western biomedicine. I met people who moved to the city from all over the country for the lifestyle, and from talking with them, a common narrative that I heard about the city is that all travelers come here in search of healing or self-discovery and stay for the lifestyle.[404]

However, life in Asheville for those struggling with mental suffering was entangled with structural violence; and to examine the social determinants of mental health also meant an analysis of the social pathologies. While those in ARMHC did not feel effects of institutional racism directly, the local Black Lives Matter movement and the glaring absence of people of color with in meetings impacted some attendees tremendously; and some used social media platforms to show their alliance with the local and national movement. Attending candle-lit vigils at Pack Square and other events in memory of those lost to police violence, I learned how some in ARMHC who were politically engaged found ways outside of group meetings to protest social injustice and to feel a sense of community and connection within their city.

Living around those near poverty meant that difficult decisions about how money is spent often took on complex logics of their own. For example, once when a facilitator of an emerging local Icarus Project chapter in Atlanta invited ARMHC to participate in its opening event, a attendee who was interesting in coming along for a four-hour road trip with me told everyone in the car that she had to sell her television to be able to split the cost of the trip. Once, I made the mistake of enthusiastically suggesting an Apple

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[404] Another idiom that I heard is that there are many ways to be white in Asheville—a taunt that refers to the way diversity is acceptable if you are a part of the majority.

laptop to an ARMHC attendee whose computer broke. Just a few weeks later, I learned

that this person only lived on $900 a month and felt badly that my suggestion likely

seemed incredibly privileged and oblivious to the realities of their financial situation.

Ability to socialize in public was frequently limited by the cost of food in

addition to the emotional or mental capacity to plan times to socialize and invite friends

out to eat. Many restaurants that catered to a number of dietary preferences and

restrictions were also fairly expensive for many ARMHC attendees, and we only ate out

together a handful of times while I lived there. Local cooperative-owned grocery stories,

weekly farmers' markets, and luxury grocery stores catered to upper middle class

clientele, and while I found myself incorporating some aspects of ARMHC attendees'

nutritional habits into my own meals, I noticed a very obviously tiered system of ability

to afford higher quality food sources.

Access to transportation and the increasing cost of living in Asheville were major

sources of concerns for those with limited mobility. The downtown area, which catered to

tourists, made revenue from the many parking garages and charging for street parking,

which often made it cost prohibitive for locals to  meet around tourist attractions and

challenging even for employees of businesses in the area to afford working downtown.

While I was in Asheville, the public transportation system started running buses on

Sundays and loosened some of their policies toward the number of bags that could be

carried onto buses.[405] Still, only those with cars could access trails, waterfalls, and other

scenic views along the Blue Ridge Parkway; and with the high cost of gas in the state of

North Carolina, it could easily cost $15-20 dollars in the summer for a trip up to the

mountains. Many older neighborhoods lack sidewalks, and with the small two-way roads

that curve sharply going up mountains, walking anywhere except in local parks and

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[405] This restriction limited the number of groceries that a person could take on the
bus, or discourage those who are experiencing houselessness to carry their luggage and other
supplies with them.

designated trails can be fairly intimidating. With the city's plans to further develop the

River Arts District as a tourist attraction and creative center, the construction of craft

breweries, lofts, hotels, and art galleries is well underway. And as gentrification becomes

a threat for those near or under the poverty line, residents remain anxious about their

ability to afford living in the city.[406]

## Emotional Ecologies within ARMHC

Over the course of my fieldwork, I came to see social engagement as my research

participants did—I began to view my friendships and other relationships within the

community as emotionally intricate, weighty, and at times exhausting in nature. Weaving

together narratives from ARMHC with interviews, digital exchanges, and fieldnotes from

participant observation, I aim to describe the daily challenges of attendees and illustrate

the embeddedness of digital communication in community organizing and peer support,

its affects, and effects upon them.[407] Here, I discuss attitudes towards digital

communication, alongside analog interactions with fellow attendees, in terms of an

emotional ecology in which mental reserves are limited and in which changes within

one's environ(mental) niches can have huge consequences for the group as a whole. First,

I analyze the metaphor of an emotional ecology as a scaffolding to describe group

capacities and interpersonal dynamics which factor into the its functioning. With this

framework, I address and describe issues of authenticity, tolerance, reflexivity, and

instability that many attendees have found challenging in communicating and engaging

with ARMHC in its many spheres, alongside how they interact with technology in ways

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[406] Jon Ostendorff, "Big Changes Slated for River Arts District," *Citizen-Times*, September 14, 2014, accessed May 16, 2015. http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2014/09/13/big-changes-slated-river-arts-district/15605727/.

[407] Here, I use the term *attendees* rather than members because there are no requirements for membership and because some of those who attend the meetings do not consider themselves a part of the Collective community.

that have a profound influence upon their mental states.[408] I then provide examples of emotional investment and depletion, including my own experiences, and conclude this section by outlining some of the barriers to ARMHC engagement.

In the literature, emotional economies are often discussed in terms of labor, with both work settings, informal caregiver relationships, and within other domestic spheres.[409] However, when emotional labor is overtly diffused within ARMHC, while implicitly accomplished by a small few within the group, the metaphor of an ecology might more aptly describe a milieu, in which certain forces [e.g. group facilitators] subtly steer the flow of emotional reserves towards certain projects and individuals' emotional needs, while challenging them away from others. In the scarce economy of emotional reserves, decisions about how time and energy is spent can impact ARMHC's functioning as a whole, as attendees attempt to participate in whichever events they can in any given month's agenda. To add to the multiplicity of factors that confound attendance and participation, the group often sees a spike in numbers during the summer and fall months; and as winter approaches, the stress of coping with the holiday season can contribute to the group's fluctuating size, with a general decline in attendance as the cold sets in. Thus, as those attuned to group needs and seasonal shifts respond to their environment, they continually renegotiate their roles and standing with in ARMHC.

To grasp the everyday interworking of ARMHC, I attended Tuesday meetings and became accustomed to their model for providing peer support and mutual. Those who were going through hard times shared their stories during the check-in period (often 5-10

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408 I initially contemplated organizing this section of the chapter into sections grouped by attitudes towards various digital (Google Groups, Twitter, Facebook, website, texts, phone calls, etc.) and analog spheres (Eagle Street Coffee Emporium, Kairos West Community Center, the house where I lived, etc.) where the group convened. However, because I wanted to illustrate the convolution of multimedia, I thought it would be better to organize this section thematically rather than spatially.

409 Amy S. Wharton, "The Sociology of Emotional Labor," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 147-165.

minutes long per person, depending on the size of the group); and sometimes during the second-half of the meeting, a discussion period, the group would revisit their situations and with permission would offer their support and thoughts on the issue. Silence during the self-ordered check-in process often gave time for people to process the words they heard and served as a way to keep the milieu calm and open. After such meetings, many attendees expressed gratitude to the group for their presence and emphasized how they all played a unique role in each other's lives. Other times, when the group was particularly large, it became much more difficult for attendees to feel heard, given the time constraints that might prevent some attendees from adequately talking about their troubles or without receiving unwanted feedback or advice. Some would feel badly about trying to balance ARMHC's need to provide enough check-in time for everyone, while recognizing that some people were in greater need than others. Those meetings felt more chaotic and unsettling to many ARMHC attendees, and research participants told me that they often felt drained by trying to attend so many people's needs.

While the check-in portion of Tuesday meetings gave attendees time to talk about their struggles and for ARMHC to bear witness to mental suffering, the process can be emotionally and socially challenging for both storyteller and audience alike. Russell,[410] an ARMHC attendee in his early 30s, explains the emotional weightiness he feels at many of the meetings he has attended,

> Listening is giving something. So we need something back. We are each investing in that space and ourselves and other people, just in being present. And it is a really thick atmosphere when you are there… So we are all giving something, but

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[410] Russell joined the Collective over a year and a half ago. When we first talked during my exploratory trip up to Asheville, he was commuting an hour and a half one-way from South Carolina to attend meetings. His voice was still quite weak from years of atrophy, having spent a portion of his adolescence and much of his adulthood in solitude. In the summer when I returned, he had moved to Asheville to be a more active participant in the group's weekly meetings. His voice was stronger, and he was starting to make a couple friends in the Collective.

do we all recognize that we are all giving something? Because we all need something back, all of us. And how are we addressing that? I don't know if we are.[411]

Here, the give-and-take he describes is not one-to-one in giving and receiving support from individuals in the group, but one that is created through mutual exchange and through the interweaving of check-ins as the meetings progress. Yet, as this quote indicates, when some attendees have a more transactional or economic view of ARMHC, they are often left disappointed that there is no direct return on their emotional investments and that they cannot simply "cash in" emotional credit to receive peer support when they need it.

Still recovering from withdrawal symptoms associated with long-term psychiatric medication, Russell talked with me at length about his frequent feelings of overstimulation in the group, particularly during check-in (See Figure 5). He states, "I can be a great listener at times, or at least an adequate listener, but it also drains the life force out of me to listen so much. And because these are such serious things that we all have to talk about, you know, I try to be really mindful, but I definitely can't operate from a center of compassion. I just can't sustain that.[412]" In his experience, listening can often be traumatic or emotionally "triggering," an experience that often requires him to "recover" or "regroup" from the meeting. He would often feel compelled to spend time alone to process some of the meeting's occurrences, drive back to his house, or find another place with low stimulation soon after the meeting's close.

Ed, who began attending ARMHC events in October and ended his participation in January, described some of his difficulties with group interactions, friendships, and other relationships. Born with trauma to the brain and raised by an abusive foster family, Ed has ended many of his past relationships after feeling emotionally exhausted from the

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[411] Russell, interview with author, November 22, 2014.
[412] Ibid.

energy he puts into them.[413] In reference to his former relationships with significant others, he states,

> I'm so tired being on the side of just giving everything [in a relationship], and because my judgment is so bad with that. People call it [the] knight-in-shining-armor [syndrome]. I don't seek out people who need saving, but that is who I seem to be drawn to. I may not know they have this major thing but later down the line… that's either who I seem to attract, or who seems drawn to me. Let me put it this way—if you don't get involved you can't get hurt.  And at this point, I would rather be miserably stable than having to deal with that…[414]

Likewise, he feels particularly vulnerable to "draining" group dynamics in which he is asked to contribute too much time or energy and susceptible to impulsive actions in situations of group conflict. He, too, spends quite a large portion of his time by himself, and while he is quite loquacious when he is in public, afterwards he often feels like he needs to "recover" from being social.[415] In relation to the group, he takes a transactional stance to the interpersonal dynamics and often wonders if he was "giving" more than receiving from the meetings.

Ed was not alone in this sentiment. Many of those who I interviewed felt as though they were often in a similar position, and as another ARMHC attendee (Mick Bysshe) told me, "I come there partly to be a support to other people. Rather than feeling that I need a lot of support. On the other hand, I think cultivating friendships is important. For the Greeks, friendships were the elixir of life. That's what gives life its joy. So that's

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[413] Now in his late 30s, Ed wonders if he should continue a lifestyle of moving from place to place or if he should try to settle down in Asheville or overseas.

[414] Ed Mashek, focus group interview with author, October 25, 2014.

[415] In December, Mashek invited me and one other person from the Collective to a get-together at his friend's house, where he had spent all day cooking a meal for over twenty people. After over fourteen hours of cooking and socializing, Ed told the group that he spent the next five days by himself at his apartment, recovering from the pain of staying on his feet for so long and from being in the company of so many people.

important to me too."[416] The ambivalence to whether individual needs are adequately balanced with those of the group is one that is held in constant tension. Likewise, how individuals engage with the group often depends on their capacity to attend potentially distressing meetings, and many make attempt calculated decisions to determine if their emotional energy might be better ameliorated or conserved within or without group interactions.

Faith, who often felt forced to take a leadership role as a facilitator, also serves as the primary contact for organizing on the Google group, Facebook group, and ARMHC website. ARMHC tended to expect her to facilitate when she arrived, in part because she had performed that role many times before and because she would often intervene in facilitation when she felt that the situation warranted further response than the self-selected facilitator could provide in the moment. Voicing her frustrations in this role, Faith e-mailed the group stating,

> It was weird to show up late the other day and then to ask who was facilitating and just get silence in response. I felt like I had to facilitate, or say something, because there was a new person there and the meeting was quite large and I wasn't about to call someone out to facilitate. That still puts me in the role of facilitator, which I don't - believe me - always want to be in. Just because it may be relatively easy for me and I am able to be variably effective in the role (though not great on Tuesday afternoons) doesn't mean that other people should just let me do it all the time. That is not supportive of me or the group.[417]

Even though she remained adamant that she should not always represent the group, I also saw her struggle with feelings of possessiveness and great care for the group. Yet her inability to articulate concrete tasks what needed to happen differently in ARMHC leadership, alongside a lack of other volunteer facilitator to step into such roles, has made her concerned that the group may crumble if she stopped supporting the group at capacity

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[416] Mick Bysshe, interview with author, September 4, 2014.
[417] Faith Rhyne to ARMHC mailing list, November 13, 2014.

that she has been. This double bind has created great anxiety amongst some contributors to the group who have relied upon others for support, yet are unable or unwilling themselves to take on further leadership responsibilities.

In December, when many ARMHC attendees felt the stress and drain of the holiday season, Faith exclaimed in our last focus group discussion,

> I can't fucking do it anymore. I need to spend time in other realms of my humanity. So I have felt very personally protective in regard to the "Collective," the group of people, lately, and I love many many many individuals that are involved within this group, and I do think it is a vital and important space. And I don't want to not come, but I also—I am just not in a space—where [I can handle] all the nuances and vulnerabilities of complex group dynamics…[418]

Likewise, the group dynamics as an emotionally-taxing ecology play out in digital spheres, as the struggle to organize online similarly creates stress and anxiety. While Faith recognizes that she could seek help from others, she also find such communication might also be exhausting in itself. In a focus group, she tells peers, "There are a few really simple things [for organizing] that could be done, and I just don't want to do them alone. But then I also don't want to collaborate on them, because the collaborative process is just—there is more communication, there are more e-mails and more conversations. So it just doesn't happen."[419] And although group members sympathize with her plight, they are often unsure of what to do to help her, even during the fleeting moments in which they feel adept at facilitating group discussion, planning events, or simply making an announcement on the Google Group.

Likewise, Kristina, another ARMHC attendee who has taken up some leadership roles, responded to Faith's statements with her own comments on the challenge of building consensus and making decision as a group. As an attendee who had taken up

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[418] Faith Rhyne, focus group interview with author, December 20, 2014.
[419] Ibid.

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some facilitation roles as Faith began to step back from ARMHC, Kristina validates the difficulties of drawing from emotional reserves to organize,

> Yeah, I am really interested in the whole collaborative model, but I understand what Faith is saying too in the whole lead with consensus-based type decisions [that] leads to many meetings and e-mails and conversations which can be super draining and frustrating. So just trying to find common ground—that's what I'm struggling with right now. What do we do?[420]

Furthermore, because so many ARMHC attendees come with past trauma around open communication, acceptance, negotiation, organizing can become an emotionally charged ordeal that elicits strong responses from those striving to figure out how the group could best proceed.

In the month of October, I myself ended up taking on more responsibilities for the group and quickly learned some of the challenges to sustaining capacity within that role. The previous month, the group had made preparations to host a series of events entitled "Mad Gifts and Saving Graces and Works in Progress: An Exploration of Creativity and Madness" to celebrate "creativity as a healing tool and art as a means of survival!"[421] The plan was to host an art show opening at Eagle Street Coffee Emporium at the beginning of the month, followed by a workshop on creativity and madness, a film screening at a local theater, and a closing reception. However, as the group was rearranging art and furniture in the coffee shop and putting up their art and those in the greater community who had contributed to the show, a couple of attendees began to receive the impression that the owner of the space was more interested in generating revenue for the business than in showcasing the work of those with mad gifts. One afternoon, I received a call

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[420] Kristina, focus group interview with author, December 20, 2014.

[421] While I by no means claim responsibility for instigating the idea for a series of art events in October, I realize that I had some influence in advocating for their planning and bringing these confluence of events together in October.

from a couple of friends who had been highly involved with preparations for the show and were greatly distressed by their treatment at the coffee shop and asked me if we should call off the show. I first asked them what had transpired and was a little surprised that they valued my opinion enough to ask me how I thought they might proceed.[422] After listening to their frustrations and humiliation one of them experienced from interactions with a couple of people who held stigmas against those with sensitivities, I told them that the decision was theirs to make. Still, I thought it was precisely because of the discrimination they felt and because so many people in ARMHC were looking forward to showcasing their art that we should continue along with plans the art show opening reception. Together, we agreed this would be best for those who had already contributed art to the event, and upon their request to move meeting location elsewhere, I started looking into alternatives spaces for ARMHC to meet.[423]

Because those attendees felt uncomfortable continuing their group meetings at the coffee shop and because many felt the current location was cost-prohibitive,[424] I soon began talks with leaders Kairos West Community Center about the possibility of shifting our meeting location to their space where I had begun serving as a volunteer. The space, funded largely through the Episcopal church, opened to provide a sanctuary for groups interested in issues of social justice to meet and to build community in West Asheville

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[422] I quickly came to realize this was my Balinese cockfight moment, the moment of gaining entry into a community as Clifford Geertz eloquently described in his ethnography. See Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York City, NY:Basic Books, 1973), 412-453.

[423] I created a script that outlined the timeframe for introducing the show and the artists, acknowledging other contributors, announcing the live performances, and thanking everyone for their attendance Although the script was not used during the reception, its presence served to provide some documented structure to the events of the night and gave Collective members confidence to take on the role of serving as a Master of Ceremony if they so chose to take on that position. For Collective attendees who did not consider themselves particularly artistic, helping out on the script gave them a place to contribute without feeling entirely excluded from the month's events.

[424] To pay for parking and for a small purchase at the coffee shop often cost a minimum of $7, a price that was not easily affordable for some members.

through a wide-range of events and activities.[425] Through a series of rather confusing e-mail exchanges and conversations between a few core ARMHC contributors and leaders from Kairos West, we eventually agreed to start meeting at the new location from November 4th and onward.[426]

After talking with individual attendees, introducing facilitators to leaders at Kairos West Community Center, setting up e-mail discussions within ARMHC about the benefits of the move, and making announcements about the change of locations at the end of the month, I was exhausted by how much time I had put into organizing, hosting Icarus-STL organizer Kerry McCullen, and making connections between ARMHC and the greater community in Asheville.[427] Even while I felt like the events we as ARMHC had put on were relevant and important, I also wondered how I had gone from feeling

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[425] Kairos West Community Center, "About," accessed May 9, 2015, https://kairoswest.wordpress.com/about/.

[426] Despite my efforts to communicate well with all stakeholders, I was informed that the way the Collective had decided to move could have been done less ambiguously and after involving more of the larger Collective community (including feedback from those who do not regularly attend meetings). Although I initially took some of these critiques personally, I also began to think about the public presence the Collective must have outside of those who attend the meetings. And with almost a decade of its existence, the Collective may be an important safety net (even if it is only conceptually) to those in the community who have known about the group for a long time, but—for whatever reason—do not feel compelled to attend currently. Therefore, even while regular attendees were in agreement that the move should occur, I was told that the decision-making process and follow-through with other community members in announcing the change could have been done better with further announcement and a longer transitional period.

[427] In preparation for the art show opening, I had been driving out to Flat Rock (a 30 minute drive one way) several times to practice on a borrowed violin with Robert, a Collective attendee who played his original music on a Wurlitzer electric piano and guitar; and together we prepared for performing a few songs at the art show opening. At the event, I shot footage and performed. Later I edited and uploaded a minute-long video clip of the night to the Collective's blog; and the video served to promote the activities scheduled later in the month. While Kerry, an Icarus organizer from St. Louis visited that month, I ended up hosting her for six days and introducing her to a number of activists working for local nonprofit organizations; and on October 21, I represented the Collective in an introduction to two films at screening with Mechanical Eye MicroCinema at the BeBe Theater and facilitated a discussion afterwards between one of the filmmakers and the audience.

like I was still an "outsider" of sorts to shifting into a significant leadership position when others had felt unable or unsure of how to perform certain tasks for the group. At our last Tuesday meeting at Eagle Street Coffee Shop in late October, I remember breaking down during my check-in, tearing up about how I needed time by myself after feeling so overwhelmed and inundated by people and activities that month. I wondered about my relationship to those in group after I moved away and the group's ability to function as whole. Faith held my hand and told me that ARMHC was not going anywhere, while Russell went to get napkins for me. Even in hindsight, I am a little embarrassed to divulge my outburst of emotion in a public space, yet that moment made immediately apparent to me how arduous community organizing could be and how I could feel so worn down after just a few weeks of taking on leadership responsibilities.

Realizing that Faith had taken on the brunt of organizing activities during the latest iteration of ARMHC, I gained a newfound respect for her efforts in doing volunteer work and her willingness to organize without pay, even while she spent a great deal of time coordinating others to help out with the project. In addition, she also spent her own money in supplying many of the items necessary to put on the art show, a significant sacrifice for her as a person who held a couple of part-time jobs (See Figure 17).[428] I also came to understand how ARMHC became a contributing force to Kristina's hospitalization in a psychiatric ward just a few months after she had begun taking a more active role in the group, as the strain of responding to e-mails and providing support for others became too much for her to handle, alongside other stressors in her life.

As a former long-term ARMHC contributor remarked, once Icarus organizing becomes something that you have to take pills to do, you might want to reconsider your role. And while I never felt like I was in danger of ending up in that position, there were

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[428] Faith bought materials to construct plywood stands for hanging art, painting supplies to whitewash the stands, and other supplies for the show—together the cost totaled almost $200.

several times throughout the course of my stay in Asheville when I questioned my role as a researcher and how I could set better limits for myself in terms of what I would agree to do to contribute to the group's needs. In dark times, I wondered if my research participants were manipulating me in some ways by asking me to help them accomplish tasks that I felt were unreasonable to ask of a young adult; and in my more optimistic times, I reveled in my role of providing care and support for those in need. I, too, internalized the rhetoric of an emotional ecology and wondered how I could best preserve my emotional resources to accomplish both my role as a "high-functioning" participant observer while conducting a sufficient number of interviews, focus groups, and digital outreach for the larger research project.

Reframing ARMHC as an emotional ecology—rather than an emotional economy—may help those within the group to understand their need for support in ways that are not transaction in nature. Nothing can be owed or claimed in listening. Listening, alongside other forms of offering an empathic response has a weightiness and depth that permeates an atmosphere of shared understanding and mutual respect. Rather than demanding something more, expecting that people will be there for them beyond the parameters of the group, or even anticipating that people will serve as facilitators or organizers, perhaps it is enough that people attempt to be mad together and to be with mental suffering as the group's unfolds.

## MOTIVATIONS FOR DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Within the emotional ecology of digital communication, the motivations that ARMHC attendees have for exploring their emotional states through technology are substantial. From stabilizing moods, to tracking their emotions, to finding support and intimacy online—ARMHC attendees report that use of technology can impact their mental states significantly, and digital extensions of the self and engagement with others

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can provide a level of connection without the anxiety of feeling obligated to stay within what could potentially become an uncomfortable encounter. Digital engagements thus allow a form of intimacy without the same obligations, anxieties, and complications one might encounter in face-to-face interactions. Online, those with diverse mental states can be posthuman—they can find support without overextending their capacity to engage. They can engage without the expectations that we place upon immediate encounters, while still reaching towards that sense of community and solidariyt. Yet, as many have discovered, digital spaces—at times—only compound the difficulties they face interpersonally and further distort the messages they send and the responses they receive from peers and those outside of ARMHC.

TJ, a middle-aged woman with two children, has used music to stabilize her moods since her memories became almost unbearable in 2006 (See Figure 11). Since then, music has helped her refocus her thoughts, especially through difficult emotional states such as those she experienced during her hospitalization in a psychiatric ward and in the months following it when she temporarily lost custody of her children. She states, "It [music] actually helps keep me balanced emotionally, because as long as I can hear the words to this, I'm not thinking about all those other thoughts that are going on, so it's kind of a distraction. If I can hear this, I can't focus on the other stuff that is trying to push their way in."[429] In one ear, she often wears an earbud headphone to her iPhone, which she uses to listen to music. In this way, digital technology mediates and helps to stabilize her mood. She becomes *with* the digitally streamed music and thinks *with* the music as it affects her engagement with the world.

One night, when TJ and her daughter came over to my place to learn how to cook homemade pizza, she found herself taking out her earbuds and removing her hat. While we cooked together, she was so absorbed in photographing our process on her iPhone and

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[429] TJ Amos, interview with author, August 23, 2014.

helping to prepare the meal that she forgot about the thoughts that usually plague her. Later, as she was leaving, TJ thanked me for inviting her and her family over and noted the significance of her ability to engage without the prosthesis of streaming music. It meant a great deal to be that she felt safe enough in my presence to be more present herself; and within the act of preparing a meal together, I felt pride in creating a milieu in which she did not feel the need to turn to digital mediation to help her feel calm and welcomed in my kitchen.

For Kristina, digital communication provides her a way of reaching out to others for support without as much fear of intruding in other's lives. She states, "When I'm really depressed I have a very intense phone phobia, and people say, 'Oh, just call me, call me,' but the odds of me calling somebody are actually pretty slim. But I do feel comfortable e-mailing people, so the Internet has been a tool for me to get support, to feel connected, when I'm really feeling down.[430] Having received several e-mails from Kristina as I became closer with her in the last few months, I do not always know what to say to offer her some solace from melancholy; and while I recognize the fears she might experience while making a phone call, I wonder if the slow responses she might receive from people via e-mail can truly provide the amount of support she needs. Nevertheless, the release of writing out her feelings is helpful for her to articulate her discomfort and sadness from in being in the world.

Near the end of my fieldwork in Asheville, Kristina explained that the discussions on the mailing list motivated her to rejoin ARMHC in the fall and credits my initial digital outreach to the group as an encouragement for her to engage in the e-mail threads once more. In an e-mailed exit interview to me, she writes,

> The google group is actually what inspired me to rejoin the collective this past summer. After not keeping up with the messages for several months, I started to

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[430] Kristina, focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

read the threads again and was intrigued by this new researcher named Erica and her work with the collective. :-)  Reading about the brunches and gatherings encouraged me to go to a Tuesday meeting and reconnect with attendees.  In the beginning, I was hesitant to add my voice to the google group conversations as I negotiated my status in the group.  I always enjoyed reading them, though, and getting to know some of the newer attendees through their posts.[431]

The interplay between digital communication and analog interactions led Kristina to feel more connected in both spheres; and the Google Group allowed her to "meet" newcomers and get a sense for who they were without first interacting with them in person. (What is more, her comments also confirm my suspicion that my very presence and the research process were themselves changing the kind of data I had collected.)

Although Faith's ambivalence towards social media is great, she recognizes the power of digital communication to transcend spatial or social boundaries and allow strangers to form intense connections with each other. Describing an intense instant messaging exchange, Faith shares an experience providing peer support online. In a focus group, she told everyone, "There is a person alive in the Philippines that might not be alive if I hadn't hung out with her in Facebook messages over a night. There are things that would not have happened which then have real impact in the world. And so I do think it [social media] is important, but I don't know how much I can participate in it or not."[432] The ability to provide virtually instantaneous support leads to a unique form of intimacy and trust, despite thousands of miles of physical separation.

In addition, ARMHC attendees mentioned the perceived anonymity of digital communication, the availability of the technology and those willing to interact online, and a fairly permanent record of digital conversations as some other reasons why some find it convenient to connect with others online. Many others find their digital presence to be more articulate and concise than their analog selves; and they prefer a crafted image of

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[431] Kristina, e-mail message to author, November 24, 2014.

[432] Faith Rhyne, focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

themselves online to their awkward engagements interacting in person. Because meeting people in person can be an intimidating or anxiety-provoking endeavor, some have found it easier to get to know others online. Moreover, the accessibly and convenience of such digital engagements allows many ARMHC attendees to find some solace and comfort in writing out their thoughts and discussing their emotional and mental states with others online.

## AUTHENTICITY/INTEGRITY VERSUS FRAGMENTATION

ARMHC attendees had mixed attitudes towards their interactions in the group's spheres. Some felt as though ARMHC offered them a space to carve out an identity that could act with integrity in all facets of their lives, while others felt that they performed different aspects of themselves within the group's various iterations. Tensions between engaging "authentically" or with "integrity" often conflicted with a more fragmented or multiplicitous understanding of selfhood; and depending on the day, ARMHC attendees fluctuated between holding more unified senses of selfhood and accepting more diffuse understandings of their representation in digital and analog spheres.

As I mentioned in the theory chapter, Faith has an ambiguous relationship with many forms of social media, not just her blog and the Icarus forums, but also with Facebook. On Facebook, she feels uncomfortable with presenting herself in a particular light—at times, as a professional, as an activist, as a mother—and does not think that her portrayal on that space adequately reflects her life. In a focus group, Faith shares some of her paradoxical stances towards wanting to shut down her Facebook account and acknowledging the value in her presence there,

> I guess a motivation to get off Facebook is because I don't feel like I can be authentic there. Then I remind myself we have lots of selves. In any given

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moment, there are a million different parts of ourselves and a million different things that may be happening or may be going on. So it's like, when did I get so rigid and modernist that I would think that, "Oh just because this is how I feel in this split second, that's all I am, and that is my authentic self?" Like what other authentic selves might I be neglecting in this? So do I have to show up as this capable, artsy, radical organizer person, or can I be another [person]? I have lots of different ways of being. So I really try not to get into the thinking that if I'm not sharing the deepest most raw and vulnerable and exposed aspect of my being at any given moment, then I'm not being authentic. That's not true."[433]

There is an element of "proving" one's madness or suffering that is an undercurrent of much of the c/s/x movements, one that Faith finds highly problematic and disappointing, even while she also recognizes that she has remained alive in part because of the ability to share such painful stories with others and find solidarity.

It is worth noting that others prefer the ability to script themselves online and believe that digital communication allows for a more polished self-representation. Robert, who acknowledges he finds it difficult to follow group conversations and listen to individuals in a one-on-one conversation, explains the ways he is able to craft a better representation of his ideas online. In a focus group, Robert states, "Sometimes in my mind, I feel like I can tailor what I want to say and sort of make it 'perfect,' because in real life there are mistakes. And there are cues, like body language, stuff like that, that convey a message. But I feel that as somebody who [is] … introverted, I feel like online I'm able to open up a bit and be a little bit expressive.[434] Nevertheless, Robert also feels awkward while participating on digital mediums and often finds himself nervous about how people will perceive him through the veil of the media,

> When I say something online, I feel like I'm walking into a dark room. I always feel a bit of hesitation. I'm like, "Well, I'm probably going to offend somebody!" I feel like I'm stumbling through a dark room trying to get from one end to another, and I'm knocking over all kinds of stuff, and I feel clumsy. And even

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[433] Faith Rhyne, focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

[434] Robert R., focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

though I say what I believe, but I feel at the same time, "What is going on? What is going on behind the scenes that I don't see?" I feel it [his self-representation online] is who I am, yet who I am is knocking over lamps, as I get from one end of the room to the other...[435]

His sentiment got quite a few chuckles from the focus group, as many ARMHC attendees similarly resonated with his analogy. Even while Robert is incredibly selective of which media he will use to interface with others, he still remains concerned about how his message will be read and by whom. In limiting his digital involvement in ARMHC solely to the Google Groups, he feels like he can concentrate his efforts to communicate with his community and learn how to be supportive to others—without knocking down too many lamps.

Others vacillate between connecting with others either on or offline. Rather than digital communication being a supplementary extension of selfhood into digital spheres, ARMHC attendees, like Russell, see it as an integral part of his life (See Figure 6). He explains,

Both [being online and being physically with other people] were helpful, very much so. And it is kind of hard to say which was more helpful. There are advantages, because the same space online that lets you blow up over nothing, is the same space that lets you carefully craft how you communicate and speak and form sentences … So there is a certain beauty to communicating online and being able to communicate that way, and that is lost in the "real world." But yeah, I think there are a lot of things in the real world that are good, sort of like Vitamin D you get from sunlight, and that is something you get in the real world from stepping out of a virtual space… I'm getting nutrients from both, which I think are vital.[436]

Russell has enabled his Facebook account when he was feeling stable and disabling it when he felt overwhelmed. (Jokingly, as a challenge to him, I suggested that his New

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[435] Robert R., focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

[436] Russell, interview with author, September 4, 2014.

Year's resolution should be to keep his Facebook account open for an entire month; and he managed to keep it open for over two weeks before shutting it down again). For a few months, when he was feeling preoccupied with shifts in his personal life, he also shut down his blog and later reactivated it as he began to feel more settled. He finds more passive means of interacting online (such as scrolling through news articles, blogs, how-to guides, etc.) as being much less taxing on him, just as he considers not visiting with people as being more comfortable than spending time with them. Despite his uneasiness in social situation, Russell has become more active in setting up times to meet up with people one-on-one and in group settings, just as he considers writing and uploading his writings online as being a significant part of his identity as a former patient concerned about the psychiatrization of children and adolescents.

Like Russell, Kristina wavers on her stance towards the benefits of digital communication. While she has long been a part of online support groups, she talks about her recent choice to seek connection in person over digital forums, stating "There is something about the continuity of seeing people week to week, the same faces, seeing how people—I don't know—it just makes it more real somehow. And I have made a couple really strong friendships in the Collective ... Several people have gone out of their way to help me out when I was in crisis. That really meant a lot to me."[437] Similarly to Russell, she readily agrees that digital communication is not necessarily equitable to the physical presence of friends. Still, during points of greater energy and sleeplessness, Kristina also finds that scrolling through her newsfeed on Facebook has a calming effect on her, and while it did not make up for company of friends, the Internet provided her a supplemental companionship of sorts.

Nevertheless, Kristina vacillates between appreciating the connections she has found online and recognizing digital spaces—at times—as being dangerous to her well-

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[437] Kristina, interview with author, September 24, 2014.

being. In October, she discussed her withdrawal from social media after being hurt by a participant on the Icarus forums who questioned the authenticity of her online persona. In her slower states, Kristina was incredibly sensitive to such critiques, because she herself wondered if she is less "authentic" during points in which she feels a flatter affect. She thus explains her reasons for engaging with people face-to-face,

> I did find in the past it has been easier for me to express myself online than in person, and I found it a really comfortable place but recently, I've gotten burned online in several ways, so now I've gotten very paranoid. When I enter a manic episode, I tend to post a ton of stuff on Facebook and send really weird e-mails to people. And so I'm still experiencing quite a bit of shame from the last time I did, and so I have hardly posted anything on Facebook since last year, because I have just been so ashamed of that whole person that came up.[438]

Even while Kristina found herself in a similar situation during her frenzied period in the winter, she recognized this tendency and from the hospital asked a friend to help her delete questionable posts on Facebook. So, while she does not always identify with the things she posts during heightened phases of energy, she also wonders about how "authentic" she comes across during times when she feels much slower and lethargic. In this manner, the fragmented aspects of her self-representation online are caught up in larger existential questions of how she can accept the realit(ies) of who she is when her mood and perceptions fluctuate dramatically.

Throughout interviews and informal conversations with research participants, I was struck by the very conscientious ways they understood their mental capacity and emotional reserves to interact online and offline and responded to them by scripting their interactions accordingly. Although this self-awareness did not always prevent them from "running into lamps" in a dark room of technogenic connections and from uneasiness in their multi-mediated interactions, the desire to connect and the search for integration on

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[438] Krisitina, focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

all spheres of life is also tempered by the nature of diverse mental states and the inherent

fragmentation and multiplicity that many of those in ARMHC experience every day.

TOLERANCE

For a variety of reasons, ARMHC is not a community in which everyone who has

attended a meeting feels like becoming a regular attendee. A handful of young adults in

their twenties have filtered through the group, and often they find social support in other

places in the community or move away from the area within a few weeks. In one

instance, a person, who had been tapering off highly addictive benzodiazepines, felt as

though she was never "mentally ill" and was scared to participate in a group with such

severe diagnoses. Others have not returned to meetings due to a perceived lack of

organization or an inability to find intensive, focused therapeutic attention. For those who

decided to attend regularly, many described a socialization process into ARMHC, a

greater understanding of their own responses to stressful interactions, and a higher

tolerance for psychic diversity.

In a research focus group, Ed told me that attending meetings has helped him

become more aware of his own quirks interacting socially and more understanding of

others' difficulties in social situations. He states,

> God knows there are things I do that I can't control and that people aren't going to
> understand. So if I do that, other people are going to do it too, and they are all
> different. Ten people can react to the same trauma in different ways, so just I
> guess being introspective of some of my behaviors has just caused me to try to be
> a lot more accepting and tolerant of other people's behaviors.[439]

In fact it was because of this cultivated self-awareness that Ed decided to stop attending

group meetings in December. After becoming frustrated with a perceived lack of

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[439] Ed Mashek, focus group interview, December 20, 2014.

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structure and clarity regarding decision-making in the group and their unwillingness to ban an attendee who had been disruptive to the meeting proceedings, he decided to maintain friendships with individuals he met through ARMHC but end his ties with the group as a whole. His decision to forego meetings was a way of protecting himself and others from a potential outburst caused by his own lack of impulse control when he may be triggered by the group in particular ways. His actions can thus be seen altruistically, as a self-reflexive decision made for the benefit of others.

Russell notices the effect that the group has had on his language patterns and in the way he writes on ARMHC's Google Group. Even though he rarely sends e-mails through this medium, he feels self-conscious about what others would think and changes some words that he thought might be overly scrutinized by the group. He informs me, "I'm just realizing that yeah, it (ARMHC) is changing my language. It is not about the intent from the outside in, but from the inside out. It's changing my language and how I communicate.[440] In the internalization of how others might perceive his words, he describes the "damage control" he attempts when engaging with digital communication,

> Online, when I have to communicate with something that is written, like a text message or a forum, it's always like I'm thinking ahead of time, just [in terms of] damage control (group laughs). I don't do that so much in normal conversation… I feel like sometimes you need your own PR department to communicate online. There is just some absurdity to communication in message form… You don't know if you are being heard, or if you are being supported. You can't even gauge presence online—you don't know who they are, how present they are—at least you can get something from the interaction through voice or in-person, but there is a lot you aren't getting (online).[441]

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[440] Russell, interview with author, September 4, 2014.
[441] Russell, focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014

Russell understands the sensitivity of posting certain material online, which is no longer representative of his current state of mind or writing ability.[442]For him, learning what might be problematic to say online has played a dual role in his transformation after tapering off psycho-pharmaceuticals. From one vantage point, he takes it as a sign of "rationality," that he can anticipate pushback or misperceptions about his intentions in expressing his lived experience. At the same time, he dislikes that he thinks about the ways that the people from ARMHC might think about him and that an imagined audience (represented by ARMHC) now inhabits his mental space—the critiques of whom may change the way he writes, or even thinks about his life. While he is very hesitant to participate in group activities, his analysis of perceived reactions to his writing is a sign that he is undergoing a socialization process into the group and social life in general, even while he might not always see himself as a "group person."

Both Russell and Monica, whose popular blog inspired Russell to start his own blog, often find the group to be too overwhelming and nontherapeutic for them, even to the extent that they feel somewhat like outsiders to the group. Monica, who has found greater support through online interactions on blogs, forums, and Twitter, discusses the socialization process into different digital spaces and the ways that people become attuned to their own challenges communicating with others as well as a greater appreciation for the nuance of certain online cultures (See Figure 7). Below she describes her attitudes toward forums as whole:

> They [forums] all have different cultures and dogmas, and I have hung out in dozens of different forums now, and you know, they are like cliques. And if you fit into the clique, fine, and if you don't, you are never going to get comfortable there... I mean, forums saved my life literally. The information I got in forums I needed to survive, because the medical establishment didn't know shit about what I was going through. So they saved my life, and I learned a lot about them. And I

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442 During Kristina's hospitalization, upon her request, Russell helped her delete some posts off Facebook that she had written in an agitated state. She has no memory of this request.

certainly didn't want to hang out in all of them. And sometimes it was very targeted to get certain kinds of information. It's a jungle out there in the forums, depending on how well you fit or don't fit into whatever given niche it is. You are on a sharp learning curve for how the etiquette goes.[443]

Advising me to not worry so much about what others said on TIP forums, Monica helped me make sense of some of my own qualms and fears about finding acceptance by other people involved in TIP online. She was also firm about the notion that I should not try to hard to get people to like me or spend any excessive time on the forums if I did not prefer engaging in that space. From talking with her, I came to see her tolerance for others' attitudes, not as values to accept and incorporate in her life necessarily, but as those that co-exist with her own carefully formed opinions.

One of the most profound experiences during my fieldwork was witnessing how ARMHC welcomed a young woman in her late twenties named Anna into the community. Anna, who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, lives in a group home and receives disability through Medicaid. Near the time I started attending meetings, she started participating in ARMHC, with help from her father who would pick her up from the group home every week. At first, I was taken aback by Anna's eccentric appearance and social interactions: She often wore quite a bit of makeup and dressed in baseball jerseys and sweatpants and would often laugh at comments people made when no one else did or interrupted group conversations to contribute off-topic comments and give unwarranted advice. At times, she made what some attendees in ARMHC found perceived to be offensive statements, even while it was clear to me that she did not mean any ill will toward them. Occasionally, when her father was unable to take her meetings, I would pick her up from the group home and listen to her talk quietly to herself under her breath.

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[443] Monica Cassani, focus group interview, October 11, 2014.

Anna often seemed aloof during the group check-ins. She talked about her dislike of the group home and her plans to move away, get married to her (imagined) fiancé, and start a career in the police department. Despite the difficulties she had holding conversations with other attendees, attendees of ARMHC who knew her were supportive of her check-ins, gently steered her away from topics that might cause others to be offended, and asked her questions about her life. Some found her to be a welcome diversion from the dreary or solemn feeling of the meeting, and her father was very grateful for the opportunity for her to socialize with others without harsh judgment about the ways she engages with them. What is more, her father also became more comfortable sharing his own mental struggles with the group. Even though he had first approached the group from the standpoint of a caregiver, over time he recognized the group's acceptance of all people with mental struggles. Eventually, he too began to open up to the group, participated in check-ins, contributed to group events, and expressed his gratitude for ARMHC's care for him and his daughter.

After recognizing my own initial qualms about talking with Anna, I was very pleasantly surprised one day when she looked me straight in the eyes and asked about how I was doing. To most people, I am sure that seems like a trivial exchange, yet having seen her become more comfortable in the group over the course of several months, I was touched by her expression of care and concern. Moreover, I was impressed by the group's ability to create opportunities for her to engage in the meetings, contribute a drawing to the art show, and coordinate transportation when her father was not able to take her to the meetings.

Still, ARMHC could only tolerate so much psychic diversity and divergent behavior. When a person repeatedly disrupted a group meeting to ask about the protocol for the meeting, demanded to know about its structure and leadership, and became belligerent at the insinuation that some attendees might be undercover agents, she raised her voice in protest and loudly exited Eagle Street Coffee Emporium. On the Google

Groups, attendees who had felt disgruntled by the incident discussed their positive affirmation to her critique that they were not acting like "professionals" as a rallying cry for asserting themselves pointedly as peers. While she clearly disturbed the emotional ecology of the group's processes, their ability to come together in a united front in a manner that encouraged the intruder to leave out gave some attendees a sense of solidarity and community in seeing others respond.

Several months later in January 2015, the same person who had created such disruption returned to an ARMHC meeting after the group had moved to Kairos West Community Center. Similarly, she soon became argumentative after facilitators attempted to prevent her from further interrupting group proceedings. One facilitator stood up in the circle and tried to prevent the conflict from further escalating, while the other facilitator began chanting to calm himself in what almost sounded like an attempt to ward her away. This time, I walked with the person outside as she threatened to sue the community center and call the director to tell them about their mistreatment.

While those in the group talked amongst themselves as they processed what had happen, the digital response I received about the incident was almost as immediate and its consequences more far-reaching. After I returned to the meeting, I received a call from the director at Kairos West Community Center after she had received an angry, rambling voice message from the person who left our meeting. Soon after ending my call with the director, I received text messages from another regular volunteer at the center asking me what had happened; and I responded by texting him that the situation was under control. Discussions on the Google Group after the meeting brought up talk of banning the person from the group, a suggestion that was a sensitive point for others in ARMHC who had experienced rejection from many social circles due to their nonconformist behavior. Because groups are usually spaces in which mental resources are required for participation, I wondered which mental or emotional "pathologies" are given passes, while others are seen as unforgivable character flaws?

This incident and the conversations that followed it made me recognize the limits of ARMHC in practicing tolerance—which could not be maintained when someone expressed hurtful or offensive speech or when they themselves could not tolerate others' mad peculiarities. Nonetheless, in attempting to mitigate individual needs and attend to personal environ(mental) niches within the larger emotional ecology of ARMHC, inevitability some people will not be able to "conform" or adapt enough to the group's norms to find a place to share their experience.

## REFLECTION AND ACTION

For some, participating in ARMHC helps them reflect on their lives and make changes to become who they want to be. Meetings, events, and digital interactions allow people act in ways that feel sincere; and in allowing people to express their emotions and feelings in a group, some have found a space to ponder on their actions with others and envision how they would like to live differently. At meetings, people are encouraged to do what they need to feel comfortable in the space; and special needs are met whenever possible.[444]

Robin, an ARMHC attendee in their (preferred singular third-person pronoun) late 20s, favors face-to-face communication with those in the group and rarely posts on the Google group or on ARMHC's Facebook group. Because they often feel self-conscious about their writing abilities and because they feel as though social media can be an impersonal space, they favor making art as a part of self-care and attending meetings over

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[444] Self-care can include taking a quick break from the group, standing up and stretching, writing or sketching while listening to others, and getting up to use the bathroom.

finding support online through more diffuse means (See Figure 13).[445] In an exit

interview with me, Robin contemplates the impact such meetings have had on them,

"This Collective has had a really huge influence on my life, in a really positive way.

When I started going, I received the support I needed to get through some really rough

months and get back to a place of 'okayness.' And it gave me the courage to actually

address some of the things in my life that I'm really not okay with."[446] In meetings,

Robin often gives voices to the stress of their job as a certified nurse assistant and the loss

they feel when their clients die. They show great empathy towards those in the group and

often tears up in listening to others talk about the obstacles they face. In finding a sense

of stability through regular meetings, they credit the group for helping her take actions to

improve her quality of life and gain the courage to create a more open dialogue in her

family about their mental health issues.[447]

While Russell and Monica do not necessarily identify with the group, they find

individually that blogging about issues related to tapering off psycho-pharmaceutical

medication, demedicalizing their narratives, taking herbal supplements, describing other

wellness practices, etc. can also create a space for reflection. Discussing his blog, Russell

states, "It is all about a narrative, how you fit into a narrative, how you create your own,

how much of someone else's you want to be, how much control you want to have, and

how it is told later. It's all about shaping a narrative and finding your community." [448] In

blogging, Russell feels as though he is contributing to a larger movement, advocating for

a generation of children who have grown up taking psycho-pharmaceutical medication.

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[445] However, they see direct digital communication such as e-mails, Facebook instant messaging, texts, and phone calls as being more personal, because such correspondence is directed specifically to them.

[446] Robin Dorian, interview with author, November 20, 2014.

[447] During the winter months, Robin's participation in the group diminished significantly, as they entered greater depths of sadness.

[448] Russell, interview with author, September 4, 2014.

Russell found that blogging also became a way for him to track his improvement and develop writing skills, which had atrophied after several years of solitude. He explains,

> I think Birth of a Patient was me trying to blog, trying to write … learning to put letters in the correct order or write or use punctuation. Because that is a large part of how that stripping away happened in withdrawals [from psycho-pharmaceuticals], and also not being properly educated because I was essentially a sick [overmedicated] person, sleeping anywhere from 18, 19, 20 hours a day. So I think a lot of it was just me trying to learn, about myself, and about things in general. And I actually wanted to be very transparent with that [in] writing too. To show, I'm just basically learning to spell again or use adjectives and pronouns. And then, even my mom told me…"When we have conversations, you have trouble conjugating verbs." So…when I think about my progress… the blog was me trying to figure all of that out.[449]

Typing out ideas, editing paragraphs, and uploading blogs to his website became a way to *think with* technology, to develop his ability to express thoughts on paper, and to practice skills that would also translate across mediums to personal interactions. Even while he still feels unsure about his blog's future and how he should engage online, Russell believes that the process of blogging did enable him to better understand himself and share his life with those around him.

Monica, too, has found digital spheres to be a place for her to reflect on her engagements with others as she tapered off psycho-pharmaceutical medication, a long process which kept her bedbound for a couple years . During this time, she used the

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[449] Ibid., Earlier in the interview, Russell discusses his understanding of overmedication and tapering from drugs as inflicting damage to his nervous system. He explains, "The brain injury aspect of coming off the meds and not sleeping for five years, they do a number on the brain and scorch the earth of things you have learned. It was just this stripping away—all these things that have happened have just left me with a mind that is just threadbare when it comes to language and intellect. Like, as somebody who used to read dictionaries, I read novels from beginning to end; and all of that got stripped away and damaged. So I had a relationship with words and stuff, like amnesia, where things seemed familiar, but I was not quite sure what they mean."

Internet as a lifeline to gain information from others having similar side effects to drug withdrawal. In addition to blogging, Twitter became a place for her to learn about herself, to gain information rapidly, and receive support during her darkest times (See Figure 8). Describing Twitter as a reflexive space, Monica states,

> In a House of Mirrors, you get everything mirrored back to you, you get the good and the bad mirrored back to you… It [Twitter] is just humanity bouncing around itself … The intensity of the interaction, something about how fast, small little idea sound bytes travel through 140 characters. And they carry an energy of sorts, and they are like shorthand for entire relationships, energetically, and I learned how to make boundaries, how to recognize bullshit in others and myself… And as I changed my own behavior, things in my Twitter World changed as well. And I just learned just a phenomenal amount about being human on Twitter… Now, I'm moving out into the world, and I am carrying out the skills that I learned on Twitter into the world in ways that are phenomenal. I have very good boundaries. I don't hesitate to say "no" when I need to. I say what I need; I say what I mean. I'm straight and clear with people, and if I don't get that back from others, I don't have much interest in engaging with them—just like Twitter.[450]

Monica credits her entanglements with the digital world as a proxy for in-person sociality. What is more, as she evolved with technology and with others interacting on digital spheres, she became more apt at recognizing her own needs and limits within social encounters and crafting engagements within her environ(mental) niches as she sees fit. Because she often finds ARMHC to be too stimulating and because she is usually able to function better in the morning (as opposed to the late afternoon when meetings are held), Monica has set a boundary for herself only go to group events when she is feeling up to being around others. She prefers attending small social gatherings (such as the brunches/focus groups I hosted) continues to apply the social skills she learned on Twitter in her relationships with others in Asheville.[451]

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[450] Monica Cassani, interview with author, August 5, 2015.

[451] Ibid., Note: In the same interview, Monica points out the intermingling of digital and analog spheres in her life when she states, "You know, to say 'real life' is kind of a joke because it is all real life when you are exchanging energy with other human beings. And it

A counter to thinking about ARMHC's spheres as a space for reflexivity, pause, and contemplation on changing thought patterns and behavior is the inherent instability of affect and social media. Like most people, ARMHC attendees found it impossible—at times—to follow neoliberal calls to "control" their emotions, especially during stressful times; and occasionally, the group proceedings were diverted to try to provide more concentrated support for some people to share their feelings, even at the risk of not responding to others' need for order and time for support themselves.

Moments of reflections on ARMHC use of technology could also bring about great sadness (and sometimes relief) that they could be replaced by others. Cicero famously once said, "To philosophize is to learn how to die;" however, a more modern take on this sentiment might be, "To Facebook is to learn how to die." There is something to imagining oneself as separate from her online representation that is similar to both dying and philosophizing, and the sadness that often follows their contemplation. The instability of emotions and the precarious nature of the group's functionality within moments of calamity thus parallels the instability of the mediums through which ARMHC attendees engage; and through interaction on digital spaces, many were left with a sense that they were all expendable at some level and that ARMHC and other aspects of their lives would continue on without them. Monica articulates this idea well when she states, "It [blogging] is like a firing squad, but it is also a spiritual experience of dying so many times. Boy, the ego takes some hits, and learning to alchemize that shit instead of taking it personally, and for me, I developed, the way I think. And I have developed confidence, and I developed a capacity to make boundaries I didn't have before."[452]This continual remaking of the self has been a positive process for her; and in

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doesn't matter if it is on Twitter or at the grocery store or at church or wherever you engage with people."

[452] Monica Cassani, focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

reflecting on her reactions to certain situations online, she has cultivated assurance in her ability to discern her ability and tolerance for engaging with others. (And while she herself ascribes to an egotistic rendering of selfhood, she also points to the way she crafts her environ(mental) niche in response to the emotional ecologies she finds on digital and analog spheres.

For Russell, the never-ending process of self-making and the ability to perform certain aspects of himself in relation to others is both liberating and alienating. He recognizes the transience of life itself, which is made even more apparent to him through blogging. Russell explains,

> Everything is potentially expendable. It's also just a quest to figure out who I am. I mean, you really get tired of the noise, and people finding themselves, and involving you in the process, just as you are involving them. And it [the noise] never stops. Again, it's that thing that keeps going, like watching the front page, like watching a waterfall with a Twitter [stream] or Facebook [newsfeed]. And some stuff sticks for some reason, but it's just the medium—it keeps rolling over, and you have to keep clearing it.[453]

As the medium shifts and as the news updates and blog posts continue to be posted, Russell grapples with the desire for his writing to have meaning and weight, even while he recognizes that is an elusive goal of the medium, which by its nature is constantly in flux and transition. Irrelevance is built into the system, and only in continuing to blog does he feel like he is a part of a large activist movement. During the days and weeks that his blog overwhelms him and he shuts it down, this sense that he is somehow disappointing himself and his goals for who he wants to be is met with the need to care for his current mental state and maintain equilibrium within his environ(mental) niche through limiting his exposure to the digital and analog world.

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[453] Russell, focus group interview with author, October 11, 2014.

An avid Facebook user, TJ often talks about her digital life on social media when she interacts with people face-to-face (See Figure 12). She often posts photos of her and her daughter at local protests and other social justice events in Asheville, including a photo of her arrest during Moral Monday, a state-wide movement led by left-wing activists. Her frequent posts on Facebook have helped her acquire over 400 Facebook friends, and she has received offers from fellow community members to follow her posts to pay for holiday gifts for her children, subsidize her rent, offer her family a vacation to the beach, and provide funds for other items. Because of the tremendous generosity she has encountered on Facebook, TJ states, "Facebook can offer amazing opportunities, both to experience the world in our daily lives in ways that we never would normally and bring people into our lives that we may eventually meet or have something to offer to us."[454] In times of distress, she has used ARMHC's Facebook page and Google Group as a place to express sadness and her want to die without as much fear that people would call the police, as others who were concerned for her safety had done in the past. Digital communication thus serves as a major site for community participation, as well as a place for her to receive financial and emotional support.

Despite this, TJ too feels a similar ambivalence towards social media. She vacillates between seeking connection online and worrying that her words will alarm others and cause them to suffer. Other times, after interacting with her friends online and watching them posts updates, she feels like her life is trivial in a larger sense. She states, "We are all going to die, and are we essential in this universe? Not really. When I pull away from social media, and I'm gone for a few days on vacation and come back, they are still there. And people will feel sad, when people die, but overall, life goes on."[455] An avid reader of works on existentialism and nilihism, TJ has cultivated a sense of

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454 TJ Amos, interview with author, August 23, 2014.
455 Ibid.

acceptance towards death, to the extent that makes her friends seriously worry her taking her life when she feels deep melancholy.

TJ also recognizes the transformative space that such instability often brings about. Referring to the renegotiation of leadership roles in the fall, TJ talks about the possibility for others to step into such a position and become something else; and while she says she would feel somewhat responsible if the group dissolved, she believes that the group will be able to figure out for itself how meetings should proceed. To this end, she states,

> When something is unstable it leaves room for something new to happen whatever that is. That thing of stability, you can translate that into status quo, so in some parts of our life it is kind of nice to have that consistency. But the instability of life, it's not always fun or it's not always welcome, it's not like every piece of it would be something I want if I had a choice, but at the same time that instability has also allowed me to form a lot of relationships that I never would have—whether it be politically, socially, therapeutically, or whatever.[456]

Likewise, since her last formal interview with me, TJ was challenged on a couple comments she made online by another ARMHC attendee; and from those interactions, her ideas of finding solace on the Google Groups and ARMHC's Facebook group have switched towards seeing digital spheres as a space where she is all-too-frequently misinterpreted.

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In March 2015, the group dissolved as a support and discussion group as those in leadership position no longer felt as though it lacked the emotional reserves and mental capacity to continue regular meetings or to outline the protocol, which was perceived as necessary to sustain the group. At the end of the month, Rhyne lays out some of the reasons for this decision. She writes to ARMHC via the Google Group:

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[456] TJ Amos, interview with author, December 10, 2014.

…many of the factors which led to the group's need for a hiatus (e.g. unclear/unsustainable leadership, inability to communicate group processes and create opportunities for involvement in the group and in the community, disparate vision of the group's ideal purpose and function, discrepancy in understanding in the group's structure and process, no clear decision making process prominently posted for all group members to access, etc. etc.) are still completely intact—these factors—and are, as I write this, still impacting the group...well, things don't change, documents aren't made, decisions whirl around...and the processes of actually organizing a core of people to support the group in being relatively consistent space of reasonable integrity in practice and purpose, seems to be really difficult.[457]

Group e-mails continued to detail the struggles and setbacks in attempts to resume regular group meetings; and from my read of the discussion thread, it seemed as though those who wished the group to return to its previous format were not themselves prepared to begin taking on facilitation roles.

Still, ARMHC attendees started meeting up at Kairos West to hold the space for the group to socialize and talk about what they would like the group to become in the future. As I write this at the beginning of April, some ARMHC attendees came together to make art together last Tuesday afternoon. Their e-mails afterwards chronicle the sense of connection they felt in being together and the sense of optimism some felt about making the group "lighter" and focusing on "the positive aspects of our lives."[458] Thus, the instability of the group has lead to a place of reflection concerning the limits of attendees to provide a safe environment to create more structure, boundaries, and mutual aid for each other; yet in this transformational moment, the potential of experimenting with something new and creating another line of flight remains.

The instability of media and affect and the sense of expendability that some attendees feel often leads to a delicate dance between communal and individual needs—

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[457] Faith Rhyne to ARMHC mailing list, March 31, 2015.
[458] Kristina to ARMHC mailing list, March 31, 2015.

one that sometimes fails. Yet the mutability of the group also spurs reflection, it can bring out moments of reckoning and transformation. Thus, as the social experiment of one model for support fail, another takes its place. Rhyne demonstrates the ambiguity of the group space and the transience of leadership when she says, "People step up and step back all the time. I am, myself, stepping back, though more in a stumbling and gradual way, and I may regain footing, walk backwards...who knows?"[459]

## PERILS OF PSYCHIC DIVERSITY ONLINE

Social interactions on and offline can also prove to be a harmful space for those undergoing mental suffering and distress. Digital communication can serve as a projection of trauma, nonconsensus reality, and suspicions of others and as a space to enact the seemingly pathological aspects of their thoughts online. While creating opportunity for connection, the risk of expressing thoughts that might further "prove" one's irrationality or madness looms large, and the emotional ecology of providing support to peers online can itself form a taxing milieu.

Anna, the young woman I described earlier in this chapter, has had a sordid history with social media. Her father and her step-mother described her seclusion from many of her peers following what they described as a "total blowout delusion" in her late teens, in which she acted under the belief that her co-workers at an auto shop were vampires. In her states of nonconsensus reality, she cycled through hospitals and jail, engaged in arson, accused her family of abuse, frequently ran away from home, and was "sexually aggressive" towards men; and when her family members could not entertain

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[459] Faith Rhyne to ARMHC mailing list, Nov. 13, 2014.

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her realities, social media became a place for her to express herself without as much pushback as she would in her in-person interactions.

Online, Anna was able to act out her beliefs and find others who would take her states seriously. However, her ability to garner others to follow her requests online led to severe legal repercussions when she posted about her plans to conduct illicit transactions. Her parents warn about the dangers of social media when they discussed one of Anna's troubling encounters online,

> We have learned more about Anna on MySpace than anywhere… It is absolutely shocking. And once she realized that we are all tracking her, she changed [her passwords]… Anna is very computer savvy, she knows her way around social media. I don't think it has been a good thing for her… We have even had to get restraining orders. Anna had an assassination plot that she posted, and this all ended up in the courts. It was up online. It was a boyfriend she was planning to kill his parents. He left Anna once he figured that something was going on. And in her mind, it was all his parents [who wanted them to break up]. So she tried to hire a guy to kill them. And she did all of this online. Her social worker and her psychiatrist had to report this, and once they did, the police got involved… She connected with some real creeps online. So watch that social media thing—it's both good and bad."[460]

Having used the Internet to order credit cards in her name and receive loans through her parents' names, she now has limited access to computers and the Internet at the group home where Anna now lives. She does not participate on ARMHC's Google Group, and her father suspects she knows that is a space where she will not be able to get away with her "tirades," like she used to be able to do online. The disconnect between the higher limits of the Internet to foster her nonconsensus reality and the much lower tolerance of her family and social circle for such behavior offline stands as a testament to the ability of mediated communication to allow disturbing, harmful behavior to be accepted.

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[460] Interview with parent guardian and author, September 29, 2014.

For others, suspicion of governments, corporations, and nefarious groups manifest readily in analog and digital spheres. In a focus group meeting, a quiet, middle-aged man shared with everyone that he tapes over his computer camera to prevent others from hacking his computer and "seeing" his moves. The voices he hears tell him that he is "being tracked by communication" and that there is a copy of all his keystrokes and digital writing. For this reason, he is very careful of what he writes on the computer, which websites he frequents, and the messages he sends online.[461] Another attendee, who has normalized paranoia as a basic fact of analog life, still feels discomfort in portraying highly edited aspects of themselves on digital spaces like Facebook in which they can feel their lives are a "consumable commodity."[462] Thus, as attitudes towards certain mediated spaces morph or crystallize, anxiety about surveillance similarly changes in tenor and severity.

Robert, who struggles with balancing his own distrust of strangers and secretive factions with the self-awareness of his past experiences with "paranoia," discusses the way that certain kinds of technology shape the way his schizoaffective tendencies manifest (Figure 14). In moments of great distress, he began to feel as though external entities—operating through an electrical interface—had the ability to influence his actions. Robert provides the following description of what he experienced several years prior to joining ARMHC,

> I was experiencing a lot of fearful thoughts of people I had known. I felt like I was being remote-controlled. My walking actions, my physical actions were being controlled by something that was not my conscious mind . . . It was almost like I would experience something like electrical shocks, when I would not do whatever this controlling energy or consciousness or whatever would make me feel to do. It would be like, "Walk this particular way," and I would go across the street. I would have to stop before getting on the sideway; and if I got on the sidewalk, I

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461 L., focus group interview, October 11, 2014.

462 Faith Rhyne, focus group interview, October 11, 2014.

would feel an electrical shock. So that [remote control] was the manifestation for how I would experience things.[463]

For him, paranoia is "flexible, moldable, and something that is not static and solid"—not a "fixed false belief;" and the incidents that cause him suspicion change over time, as he becomes accustomed to certain people, places, or websites.[464] Even while he felt that monitoring—at some level—is unavoidable, he still tries to limit the amount of information he shares online and the number of unwanted subliminal messages, pop-up advertisements, or cookies in his browser. He also listens to his intuition about which digital and other interpersonal engagements feels right to him in the moment, and he often changes plans or stops a line of thought mid-way through a sentence if he thinks he should not continue acting on or speaking about an idea. While seemingly external forces influence his engagement with others, he also has an element of control in what he chooses to do on and offline.[465]

For others, technology can extend social anxieties to digital spaces. Because of social media's seeming omnipresence and because a great deal of community organizing in Asheville is done through Facebook, some ARMHC attendees, like Faith, wonder about the inescapable necessity of social media for social interaction; and she questions her ability to perform an activist, friend, and citizen without her connection to social media. Understanding Facebook as a projection of her social discomfort, Faith explains,

> …the same social anxieties and discomforts and uncertainties and unease that I have [in face-to-face interaction], it shows up on Facebook too. It is incredibly anxiety producing. And I'm really resentful. For years, my notifications have been set so that any post goes to my e-mail, which goes directly to my phone. And so it is this constant invasive awareness that someone posted something in that group,

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[463] Robert R., interview with author, August 12, 2014.

[464] Robert R., focus group interview, October 11, 2014.

[465] Over the course of several months, we frequently talked about the realities and dangers of data mining and insidious, targeted marketing schemes.

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someone posted that in that group… So there is an uncomfortable dialectic between so much of my whole life—my social and support network—is contingent on the existence of this particular technology and the ways I have participated in it. And there is a lot of stuff that would have transpired if it hadn't been for social spaces on the Internet. So yeah, there is a little bit of a tension. And if I disappear online, what happens to all that has been built that is contingent to that, and do I care?[466]

In this way, social media sites can serve as a totalizing space; and those with sensitivities like Faith find it nearly impossible to deactivate their profiles and end connectivity in certain social spheres, just they find it challenging to interact consistently and authentically online. Facebook's utility as a tool for community organizing is so pervasive that those interested in popular forms of social activism are called to opt into its insidious presence in their lives. As some attempt to craft their environ(mental) niches in ways that are mindful and protective of their emotional states, they often feel as though the technologies they utilize also control them in ways that are themselves troubling and anxiety-provoking.

Emotional ecologies also emerge within the interplay between people's consumption of the news and the incredible impact world events had on their daily mental states. While some ARMHC attendees pointedly made the effort to limit their exposure to the news, others actively sought out news sources on the television and Internet. While I was in Asheville, Robin William's suicide provoked a discussion at a ARMHC meeting about the role of social media in spurring a plethora of interpretations about his mental states and ultimate decision to end his life; and one ARMHC attendee remarked that his death spurred the most honest conversation on mental states that they had ever witnessed on social media. In addition, the ISIS beheadings during the fall of 2014 caused others to worry about the prospect of further terrorism attacks. One woman, who had lost her fiancé in the September 11th attacks, expressed her great devastation in

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[466] Faith Rhyne, focus group interview, October 11, 2014.

seeing images of ISIS militants and wept in an ARMHC meeting about the loss of life. Another attendee posted about ISIS on Facebook and expressed her sadness about such attacks, as well as the recent murder of Muslims students in Chapel Hill.[467] ARMHC attendees also posted anti-racisms memes on Facebook and participated in other public demonstrations in Asheville to show solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement started in Ferguson, Missouri.[468] Frequently, stories of loss, precarity, and suffering cycle from news sources to individual interpretations, emotional responses, and face-to-face conversations about such tragedies, then filter back to social media sites to publically show their support or remembrance of those lost. As the news mediates their mental states, some feel a sense of connectedness to the millions more who they imagine are also watching their screens and grieving just as they are (See Figure 10).

After seeing how deeply world events affected ARMHC attendees, I could not help but wonder how their activists posts might be read to others online; and indeed, when I inquired about the reception of such political stances, attendees have told me on occasion that their posts about global events are interpreted by their family members and community members as symptoms of whatever mental illness diagnosis they have accrued. Further, such posts amplify what the DSM has classified as Cluster B personality "disorders"—such as narcissism, borderline, passive/aggression, etc; and their heartfelt expressions of sympathy and support are often read as sentimentality and exhibitionism. Because their rationality for caring about issues of social justice are questioned, psychologized, or psychiatrized, those with psychic diversity can participate

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[467] Michael Winter, "N.C. Man Indicted in Slayings of 3 Muslim Students," *USA Today*, February 16, 2015, accessed April 5, 2015. http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/02/16/chapel-hill-killings-muslims-parking/23514293/.

[468] Beth Walton, "Hundreds Protest Ferguson Verdict in Asheville," *Citizen-Times*, November 25, 2014, accessed April 5, 2015. http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2014/11/25/hundreds-protest-ferguson-verdict-asheville/70123414/.

online while they may be further silenced from participating in civil discourse in other forums.

## BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

ARMHC's meetings and digital conversations can be inviting places for those who have access to transportation, a certain level of social awareness, and technological literacy. For this reason, the group's demographic consists of mostly white, 30-50 year old attendees consists largely of those who might be considered relatively "high-functioning" people—those with the power and natural resources to thrive within the emotional ecology. For others who have attended a few meetings before leaving, the lack of diversity, the inability to discuss gendered issues openly, interpersonal conflicts, cost of attending meetings,[469] hearing difficulties and other disabilities, and sanist beliefs (or their own stigma against those who struggle with their emotional or mental states) have all created sufficient discomfort to not return to meetings. Still others find digital aspects of ARMHC involvement to be problematic by taking time away from interactions they could have in "real life."

As previously discussed, many ARMHC attendees find engaging in person and online can be emotionally exhausting work; and even those who are fairly social in the group need time away from their peers. Similarly, because so many events are planned via Google Groups or text messages, Russell finds the atemporal nature of such conversations to be exhausting—a depletion of his environ(mental) niche. Describing his dislike of waiting for responses to trickle into to his inbox or text messages, Russell uses the metaphor of power to describe how he understands the challenges of responding to

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[469] Prohibitory costs to attending meetings applied mostly to Eagle Street Coffee Emporium, although a couple research participants struggled to afford the gas money to drive to meetings at Kairos West Community Center.

conversations that drag on and become a mental encumbrance throughout his day. He explains,

> The fact that we don't use cell phones to call anymore means it takes longer to get anything settled, you can't quickly in like thirty seconds say, "Can we do this, be here." It takes hours to finish a conversation. You are waiting, so your energy is spread throughout the day. It is spread much thinner—you can't direct it in a focused way. So for me I have to step back, because it is this draining. So much so that I am in a space where I just don't want to talk to people and need to limit my relationships because I can't handle being spread so thin, energetically. But for me it is all these loose threads going, and you don't know when they are going to be tied up.[470]

His anxiety waiting for others to respond makes it challenging for him to initiate conversations; and when he does engage in such modes of communication, he often wonders if he is engaging sufficiently even while he also seeks to reach the conclusion of them as quickly as possible. While he has served as a support for many in ARMHC who find solace in his success tapering off psychiatric medications, he also recognizes his mental limits for interacting with others and often turns off his phone for a period of time so he does not feel obligated to respond to such draining conversations.

Others find the Internet to be a rather artificial space, one that lacks the warmth and intimacy of face-to-face communication. Kevin describes his binary perspective of Real Life versus digital life when he states, "The first network we forced to pay attention to is the social media, and who knows how real it is? But we ignore this network with nature and energy and the soul. I don't pay attention to that. I mean, I'm looking at Twitter when I should be looking at a waterfall offline."[471] What is more, Kevin feels as though he is not gifted with the ability some people have to express themselves well

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[470] Russell, interview with author, November 22, 2014.

[471] Kevin Mahoney, focus group interview, October 11, 2014.

through writing and often chooses to call people on the phone to sort out urgent

situations. Referring to an incident of miscommunication via e-mail, Kevin affirms,

> It's just a one dimensional venue to communication, because there is no
> nonverbals to pick up on, there is energy—there is something there—but I've
> never been able to resolve a personal situation with somebody there through e-
> mail. It usually gets worse the way I interpret either Facebook or instant
> messaging, it never gets my point across very well.[472]

Despite his reservations about digital communication, Kevin texts frequently for

logistical concerns (such as staffing the code purple clinic) and e-mails Sunrise Peer

Support volunteers regularly for announcements. Still, because he feels as though he is

able to interpret body language and tenor much better in person or via phone call, he

favors less mediated forms of communication whenever the situation calls for a more

serious or urgent conversations.

Similarly, TJ prefers in-person discussion as fostering "better" communication,

particularly after she found herself embroiled within a heated disagreement on the Google

Groups. She states,

> I realized I don't feel comfortable being on those [Google Group] discussions
> because—I don't think people do it intentionally—but it is very easy to get
> sucked into or just pulled into just putting words out there without realizing how it
> is effecting another, and seeing the response they have, and either being able to
> adjust or clarify, if there was a misunderstanding or something like that. But by
> the time you get to write e-mails, people have already made their decisions on
> what people have already thought they said, rather than hearing any clarifications
> going on. Then you have people taking sides. I don't want to be a part of creating
> any division.[473]

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[472] Ibid.

[473] TJ Amos, focus group interview, December 20, 2014.

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Because she believes people act with more reserve in person than they do online, she

decided to take some time away from digital communication. Even now, while she is

usually quite effusive in person, she responds very briefly to e-mails on group organizing

and mostly details nothing more than her availability in ARMHC's scheduled activities.

Lastly, some participants concerns about data mining and surveillance make it

hard for them to feel comfortable engaging online. Mick, who is in his mid-60s, met me

for an interview at Bojangles, a fast food restaurant in walking distance from his

apartment. He mentions his involvement on Facebook as helpful for his social

engagement with others, since he lacks a car and can only walk to a few places close by

in the downtown area. Still, he worries about his exposure online. He clarifies,

> I was a part of quite a few Yahoo listservs. But it seems like people are
> gravitating towards Facebook. In fact, it took me a long time to join Facebook. I
> had heard so much garbage about it. And I'm not really public—I don't like my
> picture, everybody knowing who I am, and what I look like, and what my kids
> look like… It's just going to be a part of the landscape for a while, and there is
> definitely controversy on how free the Internet should be, and how far restrictions
> should go, should we have corporations take over certain aspects of it.[474]

Even so, Mick found it difficult to participate in ARMHC meetings due to his hearing

issues and due to a lack of transportation; and online interaction provided a means to

create a more accessible space for him to communicate with others and reflect on his

words before he sent them.[475] The tension between accepting corporate encroachments on

his private life (through participating on groups online) and his desire to connect with

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[474] Mick Bysshe, interview with author, September 4, 2014.

[475] Family tensions and the Collective's move away from the downtown area
prevented Mick from participating in group meetings in the Fall. Because hewas unsure if his
daughter would begin participating in the groups events, he chose to honor her request that he
not attend events in which she might participate. They both have stopped attending meetings;
and while Mick remains one of my "friends" on Facebook and in correspondence via e-mail,
he has left the Collective's Google Group and the Facebook group.

others leaves him in an uneasy situation. He tries to mitigate some of his anxiety about sharing some personal information on Facebook by using a pseudonym, yet he still dislikes the potential erosion of his civil liberty.

In such regard, ARMHC has definite limits for those who may find the group to be inviting. The emotional resources of individuals, their varied levels of ability to communicate effectively online, the realities of corporate involvements within digital interactions—among other factors—all create barriers to group engagement. Consequently, those who participate in the group must balance their emotional and mental capacities within a plethora of other motivations and limitations to involvement and determine for themselves how they might fit into ARMHC's dynamics.

## Leaving Asheville

I have included a discussion of the events leading up to my decision to leave Asheville a month early because they illuminate some of the stressors within my own environ(mental) niche during a hectic time—alongside those that pervade the emotional ecologies that many of my research participants inhabit on a daily basis. The unfolding of such events also reveal the integral role of technology in enabling me to coordinate efforts, communicate with fellow peer supporters, and check on those in crisis. While volunteering at a homeless shelter and spending time with my friend in the Emergency Department, I witnessed the mental suffering that often comes with poverty and a lack of social support and other resources. Moreover, my own perspective on the efficacy of radical perspectives towards mental health was also tempered by the great need I saw for providing access to safe spaces (through bio-psychiatric and/or nonmedical intervention), healthcare, housing, education, and stable employment.

I was told before I left that entry and exit are some of the most difficult aspects of fieldwork, and indeed I found that to be true. The month prior to my departure was incredibly taxing, and as I drove through the Smoky Mountains through flurries of snow and patches of ice on the side of the highway, I felt a sense of relief that I was departing from what became a stressful, emotional time for me as well. ARMHC attendees told me that winters had always been tough for the group, and meeting attendance frequently declined in the coldest months, as the snow, ice, and lack of sunlight, and other season factors affected their level of participation.[476] Still, I felt as though it was just as I had planned to "finish" fieldwork at the end of December that all the most ethnographically salient event occurred.

The new year brought a series of rapid transitions. In St. Louis, as described in Chapter 4, the local Icarus group grappled with its relationship to the national organization; and I was in correspondence with a few attendees from that group as they sought to redefine themselves. Because I naively broached the topic of writing about this incident during what was still a sensitive time for both the St. Louis group and the national organization, I learned via e-mail exchanges that my relationship with some of the national organizing staff had entered into troubled waters. I had tried my best to be transparent and collaborative in my research methods, and I felt hurt on a personal level when my ethics as a researcher were questioned. Since I had planned to travel to New York and meet with national staff in a few weeks, I also felt anxious about the future of the project and my ability to collaborate with them later on.

**VOLUNTEERING WITH SUNRISE PEER SUPPORT**

Concurrently, the winter brought several nights of below freezing temperatures, and as Sunrise Peer Support Services expanded its reach to provide a Code Purple shelter

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[476] Attendance at weekly meetings can vary from five people up to twenty people, with higher attendance in the spring and fall seasons.

for women and families, Kevin Mahoney, a ARMHC attendee and co-coordinator of the volunteer-based organization, recruited a few women volunteers from ARMHC to staff the pop-up shelter and spend nights for most of the month there.[477] I was struck by the generosity of the shelter's volunteers—many of whom were barely out of houselessness themselves. Some of the most dedicated volunteers were living in public or subsidized housing and receiving some form of disability; and they too struggled with accessing health care, food, and other forms of support. Mahoney, too, had been homeless for a period of time after he returned from the Gulf War, and for this reason, he felt deeply compelled to provide support for the people who came into the shelter, even while he struggled with the great stress of working fulltime within public mental health care and staffing the shelter almost every night that month. I remember sitting with Mahoney on metal chairs under the fluorescent lights of the shelter, watching him scratch a newly tattooed skin of an octopus on his right arm, and talking quietly with him about how unfair I felt it was that people who had so little were the ones doing the most for the community. He claimed that staying busy and active in the community was a deeply therapeutic, meaningful endeavor, even while it put him near the edge at times as well.[478]

The shelter was a microcosm for Asheville's marginalization of vulnerable populations. Poor whites from Appalachia who followed pagan traditions often felt uncomfortable in the highly structured, rule-based rhetoric found in the Christian shelters available to them; and this was one of the few shelters where they felt safe from proselytizing. Even while the shelter remained one of the few spaces in the city that seemed racially integrated at some level, subtle racial tensions against blacks still played

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[477] For legal purposes, the shelter was required to have at least one woman volunteer on staff at all times throughout the night.

[478] In his sense of responding to a specific place and to individuals within his community, Mahoney embodies an everyday way of practicing health—not through what can be applied statistically to large swathes of the population (such as evidence-based medicine attempts), but with an attention to the particulars and with a commitment to finding collaborative solutions to local problems.

out there as well. Those who identified as single, transwomen did not meet the shelter's goals to serve women, their children, and their spouses; and during my time there, I did not see a person of Latin decent sheltered. Nightly meetings allowed for some discussion on ways to improve dynamics at the shelter, and while those using the shelter also contributed to its functioning by doing chores and helping to keep the room quiet after the lights were turned off, there was a definite sense of hierarchy between the shelter volunteers and those who were houseless.

As the weeks progressed, the physical ecology of Asheville changed—the mountains were stripped bare with trees that lost their yellowing leaves. The French Broad River became a slush of fallen icicles and chunks of ice that froze near the bank and broke off to join the slow current. Throughout the course of December and January, I volunteered several nights from 4:30pm to either 7am or 9am the next morning. I helped prepare and serve dinner, ate with everyone, cleaned the kitchen, staffed a donations closet, provided toiletries for the bathrooms, sanitized areas after incontinence issues arose, and helping the shelter's inhabitants stack mattress and sweep in the morning. Despite working with houseless populations before, I had not spent such extensive amount of time in the presence of so much tragedy. I found it emotionally taxing to witness houseless people suffer from bronchitis and pneumonia from exposure to the elements, to play with children who only knew the shelter as their home, to listen to stories of the difficulty qualifying for public housing, to worry if the shelter would be shut down for the night if no women volunteers stepped up to spend the night there, and to sleep next to those whose lives were so precariously tied together.

### KRISTINA'S HOSPITALIZATION

However, what I found most challenging that month was the hospitalization of a dear friend in ARMHC. Kristina, a research participant who had rejoined ARMHC

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during a time of deep depression, had become more vivacious in the winter months. A year prior, following a series of unhelpful treatments at an upscale private mental health center, Kristina had experienced houselessness and deep depression. When I met her in the summer, she had been living in a group home and receiving disability. And in January, she moved to her own apartment in a housing unit for those with disabilities.

When I first met her in the summer, Kristina was slow to speak in meetings and had little to say. It was obvious that she was struggling with deep sadness, and she told the group that she was still processing guilt over an ARMHC attendee's death the year prior. Still over the course of the fall, she gradually started opening up more during group meeting and becoming more verbal about her frustrations with the interpersonal dynamics surrounding her life after a bipolar diagnosis. In the fall, she started attending meetings consistently and began volunteering at Sunrise Peer Support as a peer counselor during drop in hours at Kairos West Community Center and while on call for their 8am-8pm warm line (Figure 9). In addition, she had also become more involved in facilitation and other leadership roles as Faith had stepped back from those positions. In the several weeks leading up to her hospitalization, I had asked her if she were concerned that her rediscovered ability to feel states more deeply and engage more with others meant that another manic episode was coming on. And while she did worry that this may be the case, she felt incredibly grateful that she was starting to feel like more of herself.

When a colleague began to suffer from manic states and called her for support, Kristina began experiencing similar symptoms herself from the stress and helplessness she felt in trying to take care of someone else's emotional needs. In conjunction with the stress caused by her high level of community involvement and in an increasing inability to sleep, she soon found herself experiencing what she called "hypomanic states." From looking at Kristina's nighttime activity on Facebook and on the Google Groups, it became apparent when she had not been able to sleep through the night; and her friends began to encourage her to get off Facebook and rest. Having been through several cycles

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of highs and lows which had resulted in several hospitalizations, Kristina called and e-mailed a group of friends to help coordinate efforts to be with her at all times to ensure that she would be out of harm's way in her altered state.

When I first received news that Kristina was experiencing sleeplessness, I was out of town for a weekend to pick up my sister and her husband who were visiting me for a couple weeks. Over the phone, I helped coordinate friends to take "shifts" to spend time taking walks with her, volunteering at an animal shelter, and staying the night with her as she paced in her apartment or scrolled through the newsfeed on Facebook (See Figure 10). After a few days of unrest, she started posting odd things on Facebook, talking rapidly, and acting jittery. Not only was she thinking and feeling *with* technology, she was also becoming undone *with* technology.

Although her four friends who she asked to help her (myself included) did our best to spend time with her, we were quickly becoming exhausted ourselves. Two in the group had children and work responsibilities, while the other two of us were in school and had been volunteering at the shelter on different nights. One Tuesday night after an ARMHC meeting, we talked amongst ourselves about how we could coordinate care more effectively. However, that night we had not been able to find someone to be present with her, and Kristina went missing. I drove around with a friend searching for her unsuccessfully for a couple hours down the cold, quiet streets of Asheville. Later, we learned that Kristina had begun to see things that others did not see and had walked to Mission Hospital's Emergency Department.

She waited in a room at the Emergency Department for a couple days, and when I came to visit her, we complained about the ridiculous number of rules in the hospital, the constant monitoring in patient rooms, and the fact that nurses forced me to put my cell phone in locker outside of the department after I had taken a few pictures of the room. We laughed that this hospitalization ordeal would make good fodder for the dissertation project and talked about my family's visit, and she asked me about how our friends in

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ARMHC were faring. I massaged her back, legs, and hands as her muscles cramped from the inundation of antipsychotic medication, as we listened to the muted sounds of a television mounted high above her hospital bed.

Having spent years studying medical humanities, I thought I would be more prepared than I was to advocate for Kristina in my interaction with health care professionals. Still, I saw the knowing looks they exchanged when she made what was perceived as defamatory comments about her physician and about her treatment on the public phone; and I worried about their own stigmas against diverse mental states. I asked them questions about her options, found out when a psychiatrist would talk to her about her prescription, and her estimated length prior to transferring her to a place that could provide more powerful sleep medication. While I did not receive adequate responses to my queries, I wondered how others in ARMHC, if they were to find themselves in a similar position, would have the wherewithal to ask such questions themselves or the social support to have friends ask for them. I felt myself becoming frustrated by how little resources and information were readily available for friends of those receiving treatment and wondered if there was anyway I—or others in ARMHC—could have done things differently.

When the time came for her to be transferred, I had been under the impression that she would be admitted directly into Copestone, a psychiatric ward within the same hospital system. I asked those in charge of her transfer about her rights as someone who admitted herself voluntarily and sought to learn the visitation policies prior to her agreeing to be transferred, but was told that those questions could be answered once she had arrived. While we had been waiting, Kristina was indecisive about whether she should check herself out of the hospital since she had slept two full nights, and when the time came for her to be transferred, I asked her again if she was sure that she wanted this. She told me she did, and I walked her out to the van, gave her a hug, and said that I would try to see her as soon as I could.

However, my friend and I who had been spending time with Kristina in the ER felt rather duped when we learned that she had been transferred instead to a psychiatric evaluation unit, where she would be held for an indeterminate amount of time until a bed opened up at Copestone. We were not allowed to visit her while she was being evaluated and waiting for a space in the psychiatric ward, and I was only able to receive calls from her but unable to call her myself to talk over the phone. When she was eventually transferred to the psychiatric ward, I still had trouble communicating with her, since she was only able to make outgoing local calls. Because both Kristina's mom (who was living in the area) and I both had cell phone numbers outside of Buncombe County, Kristina was only able to relay messages to me through friends.

When I visited her in Copestone, I was struck by the tenor of the ward, which seemed much warmer and friendlier than other psychiatric wards I had visited. In the months prior to her hospitalization, Kristina had prepared a Mad Map, an informal advance directive listing helpful coping mechanisms, preferred psychiatric wards for hospitalization, emergency contacts, and other key information; and during her stay, she received special permission from the staff to keep her Mad Map binder with her. She said the binder enabled her to receive a certain kind of respect from staff, as the foresight and rationality behind it's creation lent them to see her as a responsible, "compliant" patient. The nurses and staff provided constructive criticism of the plan and she felt that it lent itself to better treatment in the unit.[479] She showed my friend and I the Mad Map scrapbook as we sat in a crowded visitors area; and as we looked at old photos and inspirational quotes in the scrapbook, she joked that the psychiatric ward felt a bit like an indoor summer camp, with its brightly colored walls and sunny windows.

Despite my reservations about her stay in a psychiatric ward, having visited a rather couple dreary ones in Texas, a part of me was rather relieved that she decided to

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[479] Kristina to ARMHC mailing list, March 8, 2015.

admit herself. I had committed to staying with her had she decided against hospitalization and with all the side effects she had been experiencing from the increased dosage of medication, I was very unsure if I could provide a calming space where she would be adequately attended. Because she had so much energy, the urge to walk incessantly was almost unstoppable, I also doubted that I would be able to keep pace with her, and at night, I could not imagine myself being able to stay up with her for several nights and try to mitigate the amount of time she would spend posting on Facebook.

Talking to a friend who ended up becoming Kristina's primary advocate and liaison between Kristina's family and her friends, we discussed the ambiguity of our roles and responsibilities as peers; and because of my dual role as a participant observer, I wondered if I were doing too much to coordinate efforts and what would have happened in her hospitalization experience if she had not had so many concerned friends around her? Furthermore, because my friend and I could be considered "high functioning" peers, I wondered how many others in ARMHC could have been able to provide the level of support that we did? Even then, I felt exhausted and unable do enough for Kristina during her time of need.

The month I spent in Asheville when I had planned to write the dissertation and *not* conduct fieldwork affirmed my conviction that digital spheres are deeply enmeshed and inseparable from analog interactions—that is, at least, they were in my world. I texted, called, and exchanged e-mails with quite a few ARMHC attendees to provide updates, coordinate efforts, and work in tandem to provide peer support. I used my cell phone to coordinate with my sister and her husband for sharing the car and working out other logistics on the nights I stayed at the shelter while they were in town. On my laptop, I looked at Kristina's posts on Facebook to see if she had been able to get any rest at night, checked-in with friends and mentors from Texas, e-mailed ARMHC to let them

know about my plans to leave Asheville at the end of the month.[480] I, too, had become posthuman within a maddening emotional ecology.

## Discussion

The stories that are shared within ARMHC meetings and through digital conversations have a gravity and profundity to them that is deeply meaningful—and occasionally—ameliorative for those who continue to participate in the group's emotional ecology. Immersing myself into the cultural beliefs, norms, and practices of ARMHC, I found that technology is an integral part of their sociality, and for many, it fosters a sense of commonality in their sensitivities to the world—a sense of being mad together. It provides a point of connection, even while it protects some from the anxieties and other stressors associated with engaging in analog spheres. At times, technology is a supplement to personal interaction. Other times, it becomes a replacement entirely. Moreover, as those with diverse mental states become extended—and sometimes overextended—through digital communication, they also become posthuman.

A cursory look at the history of ARMHC, in its first and second iterations, reveals gaps and fissures within its digital archives, group offshoots, and multi-mediated representations on and offline. Mis/communication in digital spheres has brought people together, just as it has further confounded individuals' roles within the group and has led

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[480] I had contemplated the idea of having a going away party as a way of providing some closure, but after everything that had transpired, I felt too fatigued to plan any event, which I knew might also be stressful for ARMHC attendees to attend, given some issues some of them had with feelings of abandonment and interacting with large groups or with "normies" (how some in the ARMHC referred to my friends outside of the group). I said my goodbyes to a few friends who reached out me to spend time together before I left, but was rather relieved to exit without too much fanfare. Still, I drove away from Asheville feeling very unsettled about the future of the ARMHC, my role as a participant observer and a friend to those within it, the work I had done building connections within the larger community, and my shift back to life as a graduate student in Texas.

to their dissolution. Like TIP's digital and analog transformations throughout the years, ARMHC, too, has experienced a great deal of data loss, dynamism, and instability.

Moreover, the suicides of two ARMHC attendees and the in/ability of the group to alleviate mental suffering circumscribe the seemingly inevitable points of loneliness and hopelessness many have felt—even within a community of peers. For those who have seen this group wax and wane over the years and for those loved those who flew too close to the sun, these deaths serve as moments for reflection on the precarity of those with diverse mental states. For some, such loss has become a touchstone to build a stronger, more tightly-knit community. For others, their loss is simply a solemn recognition of those lives that cannot be saved—of those whose psychic diversity could not be sustained within the emotional ecologies around them. In pausing to recognize the lives that have been lost and the digital traces that remain of those who once were, I found a more nuanced understanding for the thresholds, boundaries, and constraints associated with radical approaches to mental health, mutual aid, and peer support.

My friendships with those in ARMHC have also allowed me to glimpse into their individual environ(mental) niches, as they explain the logics at play in their decision-making processes for engaging with technology. While some feel as though they can carefully curate their experiences with technology in a helpful manner, others dislike the tensions between their ontology and the level of agency they hold in relation to technology. They feel incredibly tethered to—even co-dependent with—their devices and to the Internet, which give them a sense of comfort and togetherness. In other instances, some literally feel so controlled by technology, that they are forced to act on impulses, as though their thoughts and actions are guided and influenced by the compelling directives of digital instruments. Likewise, digital communication can serve as a dangerous space in which suspicion towards others and other potentially destructive interpersonal dynamics become all too apparent. Regardless, technology serves to in/form the environ(mental) niches of those in ARMHC and influence their affective engagement within the world.

What is more, this chapter points to the ways that technogenesis within ARMHC's emotional ecologies cannot be easily contained or controlled; neither can it always be rationalized, operationalized, or instrumentalized. Organizing mad communities is inherently an uncivil project, with unanticipated consequences and instability. In its chaotic unfoldings, there is no way to predict the kinds of messages that are sent to ARMHC mailing group or posted on their Facebook page and website; nor is it possible to predetermine how newcomers—or even frequent attendees—are received within the group at any given time and how their engagement with others affects greater emotional ecologies.

Despite the uncivilizing aspects of being mad together, I also discovered that the manner through which people engage in mad communities can sometimes parallel the relationships established between psychiatrists and their patients. Similar in some ways to the practice of medicine, socially mediated technology intrinsically cultivates an element of surveillance and control of oneself and others. Even amongst those in ARMHC who strongly critique the stigma of diagnostic labels, the ethics of forced treatment, and the efficacy of psycho-pharmaceuticals, the medical or psychiatric gaze is replaced—or complimented—by the gaze of others within the group who also judge the rationality of fellow attendees' actions or words on and offline.[481] Likewise, there is also a belief that individuals can craft egotistic narratives and achieve recovery—a teleological arc of moving from mental illness to wellness.[482] Alongside this notion, there is also a sense that one will always need to monitor his thoughts and behaviors for potentially pathological

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[481] For example, I myself "monitored" and, in a sense, "pathologized" my friend as she posted confounding statements on Facebook late at night. I could tell that she had not been sleeping regularly and that she had stopped "making sense" online; and I grew worried about her mental state and safety offline as well.

[482] As is the case for a majority of psychiatric interventions, there remains a sense that one can become better—but never cured—through medical or therapeutic intervention.

behavior; and that while one can feel "better" within ARMHC, they are never free from some form of reflexivity and self-pathologization of their states.

Likewise, people continue to grapple with an economic perception of the group as being a transactional space. Some feel as though they ought to be able to rely on their friends to support them in times of crisis—that emotional support of one person can be saved and exchanged for another's at a later date.[483] This perception has caused great tumult within the group as some feel as though they are giving too much of their own emotional capacity to support others, without receiving sufficient support in exchange. Similarly, problems also arise for those who may be perceived as "high-functioning" when those experiencing persistent mental suffering call on them again and again for aid in their survival; and within the emotionally exhausting endeavor of keeping oneself afloat, it can become too much of a burden to shoulder other's mental states as well. Nevertheless, the endeavor continues, even as it adapts to take on a different shape and artistic intention.

## Conclusion

I am reminded of the lives my friends and research participants in Asheville lead every day. Their stories of bravery, solidarity, fragility, and precarity stay with me; not just because of their poignancy, but because I continue keep up with them by reading conversations unfold on Google Groups and announcements on the Facebook group, through text conversations and calls and Snapchats. While checking e-mails in Houston, I learned that Faith, as a long-term facilitator for ARMHC, was growing tired of keeping the group afloat; and with Kristina in and out of the hospital for a couple months, ARMHC meetings also became too overwhelming a responsibility for her to take on as a

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[483] Here, we can see parallels between this belief and what is typically expected within a clinical encounter—namely, that a psychiatrist ought to provide a prescription (or some treatment regime) following the ritual of performing madness, describing symptoms, and providing payment for services.

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facilitator. With others feeling unsure about their willingness or mental capacity to facilitate meetings and with another ARMHC attendee expressing the desire to end their life, I read online about the frustration and anger attendees felt in being unable to support and sustain individuals in the group, including their struggles setting boundaries and making their own needs a priority. From Brooklyn, I learned about Faith's decision that the group should take a hiatus for the month, even while she tried to be a quiet presence at the meeting place during the time ARMHC usually met on Tuesdays. I followed along conversations in ARMHC about an upcoming film screening of a movie on depression and their plans to partner with Mechanical Eye Microcinema.[484] The other day, I talked to a friend from ARMHC, received photographs from another via e-mail, and I continue to send the group updates about my travels and the dissertation project's progress. As of June 2015, ARMHC plans to regroup "not as a radical mental health support discussion space, but just as a non-stigmatizing open community space, with some art-making and socializing."[485]

Having spent so much time with people in ARMHC and recognizing the integral role that the group plays in the social lives of many attendees, it has been hard for me to let go of the idea that ARMHC could provide the intensive kind of support and friendship that several of its attendees needed. Perhaps it could foster mutual aid for a time when people were relatively stable, but even when a couple core attendees took a step back from the group, it became very apparent how tenuous the group is tied together. In the weeks leading up to my departure from Asheville, I knew that I should not be the one offering to make a facilitation guide—writing out protocol on decision-making, crafting scripts to run the meetings, and write standardized e-mail announcements to send out, in

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[484] An organization that collaborated with the Collective to host a screening during the Mad Gifts and Saving Graces event in October. See Mechnical Eye Microcinema, "About," accessed May 9, 2015. http://mechanicaleyecinema.org/about/.

[485] Faith Rhyne to ARMHC mailing list, June 10, 2015.

hopes that these materials would help fortify the group from catastrophe. Yet, out of my own desire to see the group flourish, I tried to bring some of these materials together before I left.[486] Such tools would never replace the need for facilitators with the right kind of personality and reflexivity to be able to read the needs of a group well, be present in the meetings, sort through debates online, to build consensus within the group, and mentor others in the group to become facilitators themselves. Neither could such protocol mitigate the reality of precarious emotional states and the draining effect they can have in a group whose attendees were deeply sensitive to the emotional states of their peers. In short, there is no way to instrumentalize how to be mad together. Regardless, I found it painful to extricate myself from the wellbeing of ARMHC, recognize the dependency that I was forming in my newly discovered niche as a community organizer, and move away from the emotional intensity of that environment.

I do not know what the future of ARMHC will bring, but I speak to my own emotional fatigue that I felt as a highly involved attendee. The emotional ecology of witnessing suffering and the stakes of letting a friend down are great. In certain instances, it is a matter of life or death. And when the stakes are so high and the emotional capacities of ARMHC attendees are so varied, it is easy to see how miscommunication or misinterpretation in person or via digital mediums can lead to disaster. Digital spheres extend the space that mutual aid and peer support can occur, yet—as this chapter demonstrates—it can also, paradoxically distance those with great sensitivities from each other, create artificial divisions, and further project diverse mental states upon those who might not have a great deal of tolerance and understanding for what it means to be mad together.

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486 This attempt only led so a rough draft of a guide which was used at a facilitator training session I helped organize with Faith at the beginning of January.

## Chapter 6: Image Life: A Photo Essay

In the pages that follow, I offer a series of images as a visual complement to the dissertation and illustrate the many ways people animate digital spaces, and the ways digital spaces alter sociality. The images are one attempt to communicate, to make an affective force real through co-creating art with my research participants. Photography, as a slow process, requires patience and a way of listening and watching others, a method that has an affective, aesthetic quality—one that gestures to ways of approaching technology in a non-technical mode. These images have a vitality that intermingle and co-evolve with that of those who place them online and changes what it means to be mad together.

I intersperse photographs and videos I have made with research participants alongside screenshots from websites that host such visual information. Some images are highly trafficked—they are liked, copied, and find new uses and meanings across the Internet. Other images take on fewer dimensions due to the concerns some have against self-disclosure online and a lack of social capital online (and offline). While I make screenshots from Facebook, advertisements for credit cards and fitness regimens on the sidebar of the website reaffirm how deeply entrenched we all are within capitalist agendas: Both image and human are caught up within the neoliberalization and technologization of the self, as Twitter, Facebook, Google, Skype, YouTube, and WordPress serve as platforms for visuals to be shared, data mined, social networks to be analyzed for their potential profit.

As I look through these images, I am reminded by the many moments that cannot be captured through this static medium—the moments of chaos or despair that were too profound to be disrupted by the click of a camera, the Facebook posts written and photos posted in frenzied states that were taken down in shame or regret, and the ineffable sense

of loss that permeates the memories of those whose sensitivities to the world have been too much to bear.
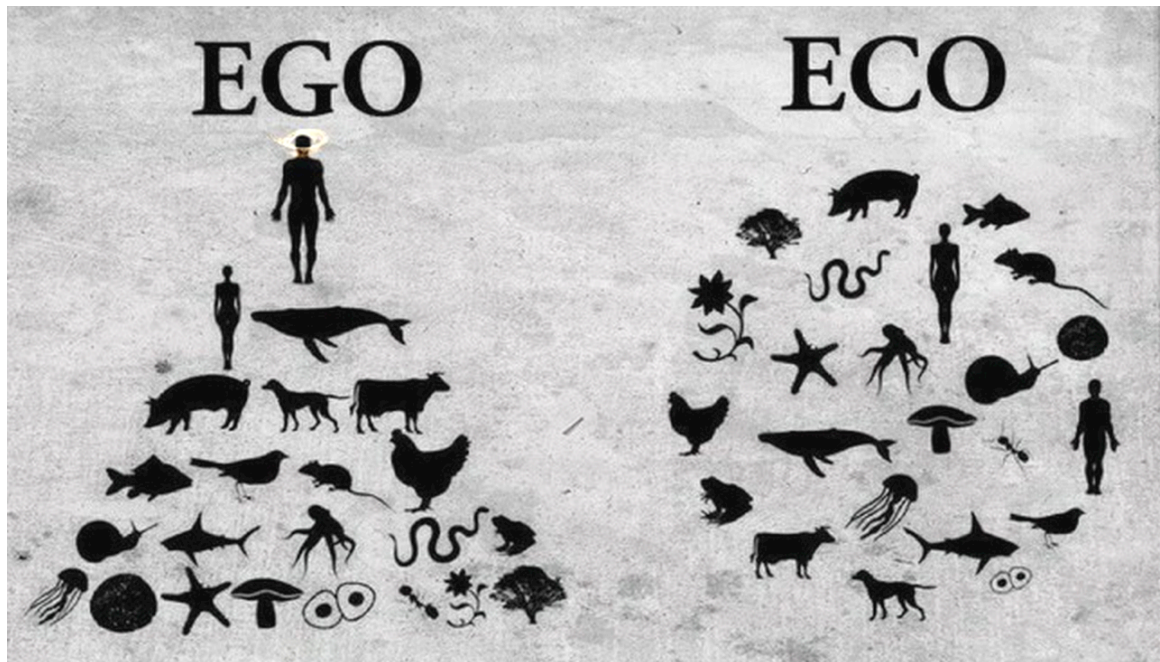

**Figure 1. Internet meme depicts aspects of my theoretical framework.**


**Figure 2. Wildflowers found on a hike at Sam's Knob Summit Trail.**

**Figure 3. Screenshot of a photograph on Facebook, made by Kerry McCullen in October 2014.**



**Figure 4. Kerry meditates while she thinks about what she wants to say in a short video we later record.**

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**Figure 5. Russell asks me to make a photograph for him for his Twitter, Google+ account, and WordPress blog.**



**Figure 6. Screenshot of Russell's Twitter Feed.**

**Figure 7. Monica Cassani sits on her couch while I set up my camera to record a short video together.**



**Figure 8. . Monica posts our video on her YouTube channel, as well as on Twitter and Facebook.**

**Figure 9. . Kristina is a specialist for Sunrise Peer Support and a volunteer at Kairos West Community Center.**
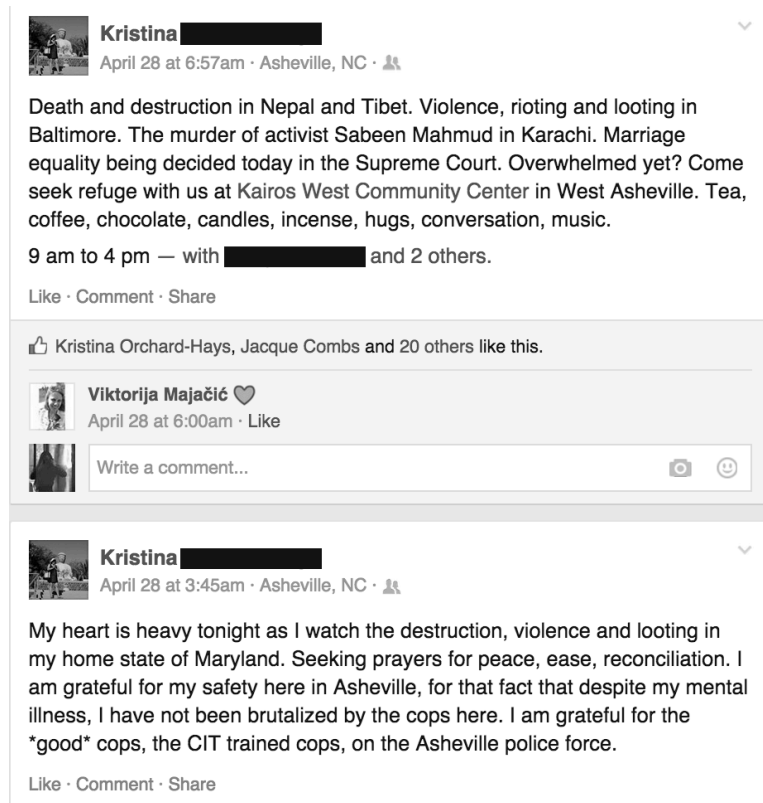


**Figure 10. . Kristina often uses Facebook to give and receive support as world events affect her intensely.**

**Figure 11. TJ and her daughter are involved in protests, volunteering, and other forms of activism locally.**



**Figure 12. TJ shares her traumatic experiences growing up with an abusive father on Facebook.**

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**Figure 13. Self-portraits made by Robin, a participant in the October art show.**

Figure 14. Fostering creativity and inventiveness is integral to Robert's understanding of mental wellness.

ericafletcher

medical humanities, mad studies, unstable media, life, the universe, and
everything...
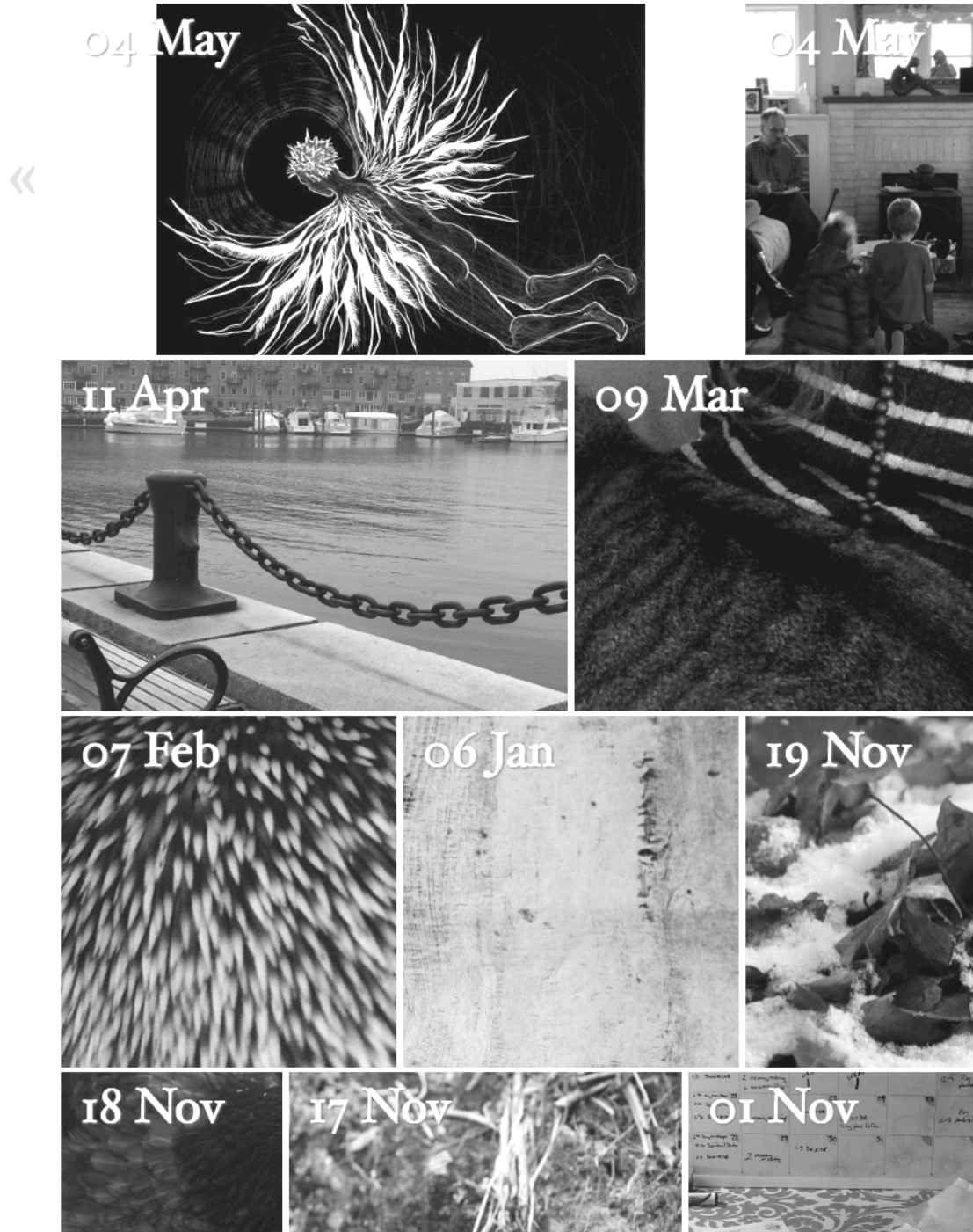


Figure 15. My blog houses research updates in the forms of videos, e-mails, and photographs from fieldwork.

**Figure 16. Faith's drawing at an event in which participants are asked to illustrate a point of connection.**



**Figure 17. Faith hosts a work session and potluck at her home to prepare for the upcoming art show.**
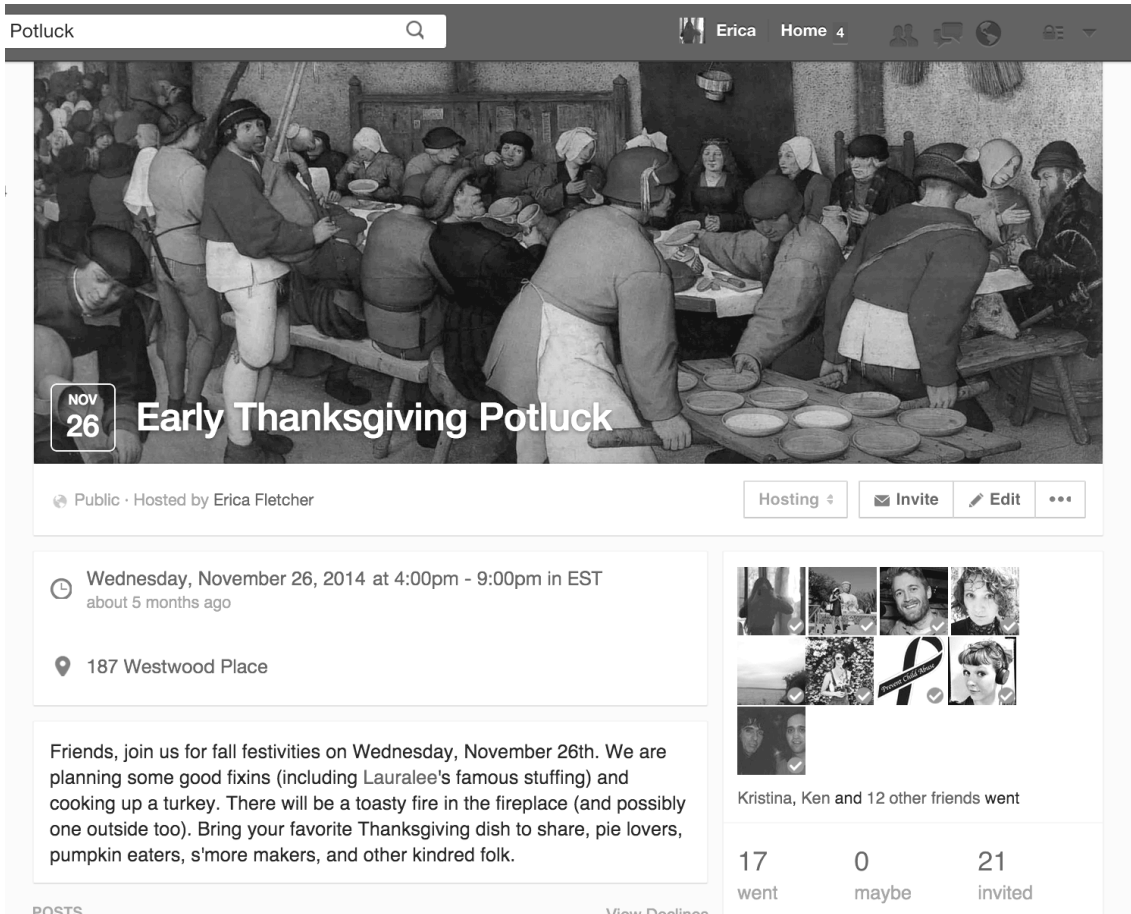
**Figure 18. Screenshot of an event I announce on Facebook, among other digital spheres.**



**Figure 19. Thanksgiving celebration at my residence, a place that quickly became a hub for socializing.**

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**Figure 20. My introduction to Icarus staff on April 18, 2014 is punctuated by a precarious Skype connection.**
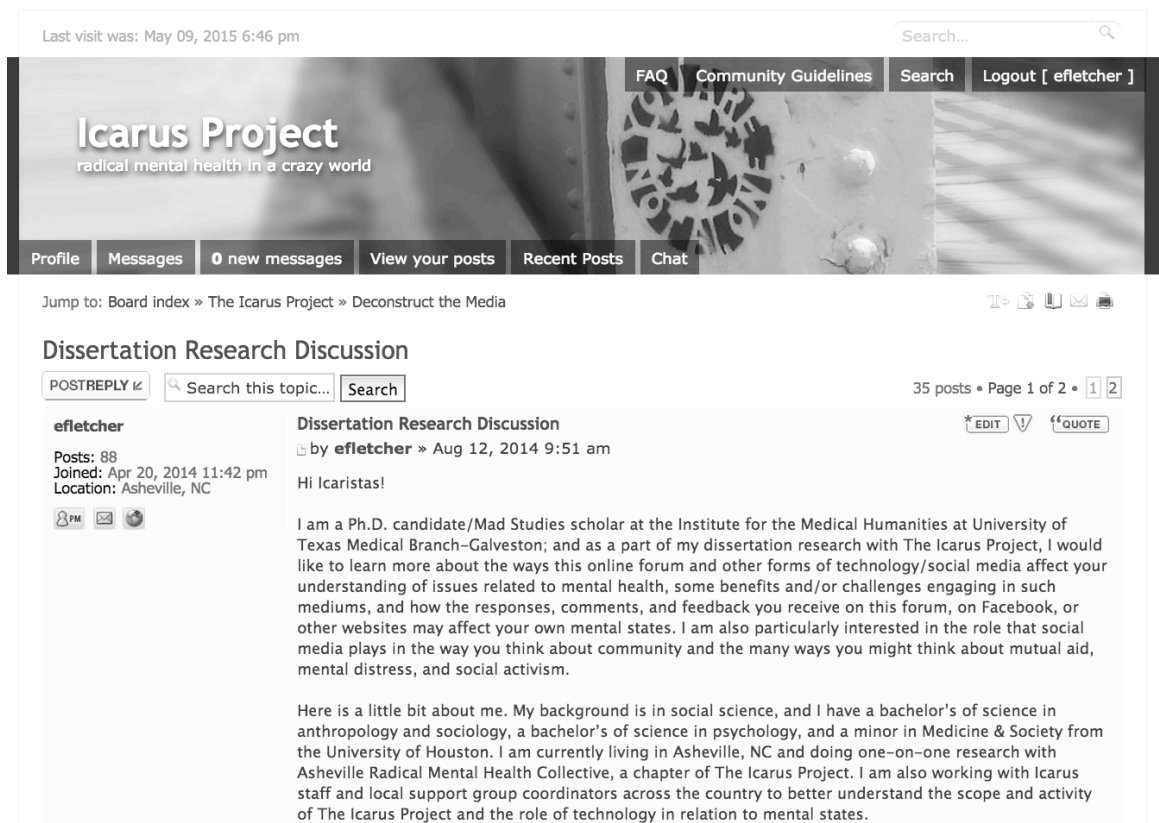


**Figure 21. The online forum allows for longer conversations than TIP's Facebook group.**

**Figure 22. Screenshot from TIP website in February 2010, after another substantial redesign.**



**Figure 23. This essay about decolonization is uploaded on the new website shortly after it came online in 2015.**
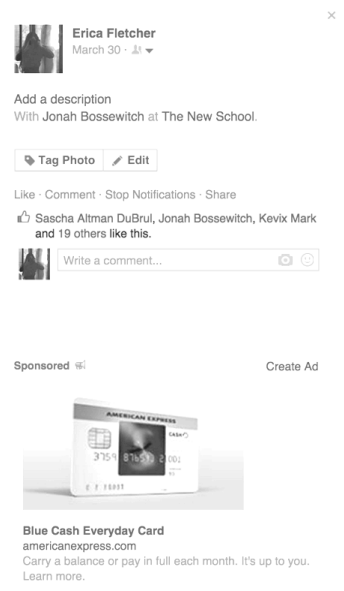
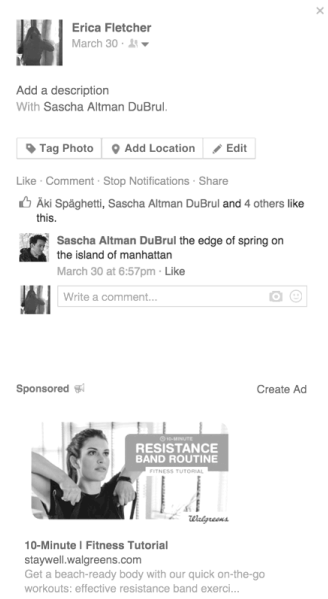**Figure 24. Jonah attempted to keep TIP's online networks free, collaborative, and transparent.**



**Figure 25. DuBrul looks out on the Hudson River as he describes his friendship with Icarus co-founder "Jacks."**

**Figure 26. Organizers from Icarus NYC held meetings in the Trump Towers, a rare, public indoor space.**



**Figure 27. Bluestockings Bookstore, Café, and Activist Center in Manhattan hosts monthly Icarus NYC events.**

## Conclusion: Mad Spirits and Specters: A Myth Revisited

> My practice is quite simple really: to remember my true place in the pattern of life and continue to erase the lies that would remove me from nature. For that is the ultimate assault on our lives, the idea that we are any more or any less than a sacred part of the outrageously beautiful and complex diversity of life on Earth. Our differences are at the core of spiritual struggle on this beleaguered planet.
>
> —Grace Nichols[487]

> The closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become.
>
> —Martin Heidegger[488]

My time with Mad Ones from TIP has allowed me to glimpse into the environmental stressors and technologies that give shape and form to mental states; and in the promise and peril of our technogenic moment, entanglements of social media within everyday encounters hold the paradoxical potential to bring people together or to alienate them further from each other. It exposes the vulnerability of our mental states within digital and analog spaces and the fragile attempts we make to connect with others and take heart in being mad together. At its best, the organization is about a turning towards what needs to be said about the limits of psychiatry, responding to the call to listen to others, and to recognize everyday triumphs and small decisions as markers of health on one's own terms. The ways TIP contributors achieve everyday health embodies an ontological stance that differs from that of biopsychiatry, which posits people as mentally healthy or ill, under the influence of psycho-pharmaceuticals or not, compliant or non-compliant. In short, TIP allows us to think differently, to be differently, and to inhabit new spaces in profoundly different ways.

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487 Grace Nichols, e-mail message to author, July 30, 2015.

488 Martin Heidegger, "Question Concerning Technology," 35. Faith Rhyne, e-mail message to author,

Yet, as I conclude this dissertation, my initial forays into the perplexities of madness have left me with many more questions about technogenesis as a critique, alternative, and further instantiation of biopsychiatry. How might a person's environ(mental) niche change over a long period of on and offline engagement with mad peers? Will the same challenges to organizing continue to emerge within the more artistic, less goal-oriented Icarus group in Asheville? What comparisons can be made between TIP and the leadership structures and emotional ecologies of other peer-based organizations? How is technology shaping and becoming shaped by social movements? How might "uncivilizing" processes take shape among c/s/x movements and other health social movements? And how might ecological practices such as "re-wilding" take form amongst humans?[489] Such potential trajectories for continued research could illuminate further the relationships between agency and technology, mind and body, sociality and environment.

As I am also left wondering how might we begin to reflect on such frailties and to peer into the void of our own mortality? How might we ponder on those ineffable places where the beauty, ugliness, and mystery of madness lies? DuBrul, describing the suicide of Sara Bilezikian, his fellow traveler and lover, struggled to come to terms with her madness—or rather, their madness—not a shared diagnosis of bipolar disorder, but a shared experience of abandoning normative life trajectories and riding trains together. Soon before he co-founded TIP, DuBrul reminisced,

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[489] In Yellowstone National Park, reintroducing wolves to the land in the mid-1990s enabled the preservation of diverse species of animals and land surrounding waterways. By bringing back predators, biologists noted that deer populations began to travel in herds for safety. In the areas where the deer had once overgrazed, vegetation started to grow; and as new trees and other plants flourished, birds returned to nest. Beavers also found homes within the emerging meadows and forests; and soon their dams became home to fish, amphibians, and reptiles. Amongst other cascading effects, the increase of topsoil and rooting plants alongside the banks of rivers and streams solidified waterways and staved off the desertification of the park. See Jessica Gross, "A Walk on the Wild Side: 7 Fascinating Experiments in Rewilding," TEDBlog, September 9, 2013, accessed May 28, 2015. http://blog.ted.com/a-walk-on-the-wild-side-7-fascinating-experiments-in-rewilding/.

Etched in my mind crazy like skipping record grooves—snippets from far away letters and late night conversations, visions of her haunting smile and memories of promises that she'd always be there for me when I needed her. I've been shaking and crying—slipping between waves of numb shock and deep sadness. It's so hard to believe that she took her own life. I can't believe Sara left all of us so soon.[490]

What does it mean that the memory of the young Armenian woman has a life of its own, even as it is subsumed within the ancient tale of a boy who died? How might we grapple with the death of Icarus and the communities founded upon his myth? Are they fated to meet a similar end? And what knowledge can be gleaned from all the specters—fragmented memories, empty screens, broken hearts, gravestones—that still linger? How can we begin to address the structural violence against racial and ethnic minorities that thwart them from accessing health care, much less resisting psychiatrization? Through technology, the dead remain specters, retaining some form of life through their continual representation online.[491] And within the untold stories of madness and in the digital and mental collapse of certain emotional ecologies—those who have left mad communities in despair, the ones whose friends could not save them, the ones who died at their own hands, the silent darkness must give us pause.

Social theorist Judith Butler describes the profound loss that such loss and void can have upon us when she writes,

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[490] Sascha Altman DuBrul, "Too Close to the Sun."

[491] As Elizabeth Drescher notes, digitized space retain their own hauntologies, traces of the dead which take a life of their own online. She suggests "digital media [has] allowed for the development of a perpetual body and consciousness maintained by the memories shared and newly developed content added to the digital pages of the deceased by those in their networks." Through technology, the dead remain specters, retaining some form of life through their continual representation online. More broadly, the bending space and time has huge implications for how we think of the sharp divisions, quantifications, and linearity of space, time, and matter. In this way, subjectivity and materiality blur and become harder to trace in digital folds. See Elizabeth Drescher, "Pixels Perpetual Shine: The Mediation of Illness, Dying, and Death in the Digital Age," *CrossCurrents* 62, no. 2 (June 2012): 204-218.

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us… If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? … Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.[492]

Though this process of undoing is maddening in itself, the transience of Icarus communities and the instability of the spheres they inhabit demonstrate the profound kinds of relationships that have been created within a moment. The fleeting, ephemeral quality of connections and the losses people experience within such spaces thus reify our further fragmentation and diffusion—our very undoing in the world.

Moreover, under such a threat, Mick Smith acknowledges the significance of those humans and other species that may become extinct—due to our inability to foster the diverse ecological systems necessary to sustain such forms of life. Discussing the ethical and political implications of this loss, he explains,

The dead no longer walk or appear among the living as they once did; the worldly possibilities resident in their singular being are lost or dispersed; their significance is exposed to the whims of memory and history; the experiential opening onto the world that was theirs, and theirs alone, is extinguished; their constitutive, yet hardly fathomed, roles in the wider community fall empty. This is not to say that life will not go on, that different possibilities will not arise, that the world will cease to be made meaningful to, or experienced by, others, or that community necessarily collapses, but to notice an irredeemable loss, a loss that even eternity cannot rectify. The extinct too, like the dead, have passed their earthly time, they can no longer "be-here", they are no longer within our reach and touch. And whether speaking of a singular death or a specific extinction, these likes are

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[492] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, UK: Verso, 2004), 22-23.

ethically and quite literally irreplaceable, nothing will ever take their place in the world.[493]

Smith asks us to consider what are our duties toward those who suffer from the threat of extinction: Which suicides and other deaths are taken with respect and dignity? Whose lives truly matter? What kind of future will we share if our world cannot support certain ways of being? And how can we foster diversity in a maddeningly polluted world? This understanding of irreplaceable loss opens up our moral responsibilities to lifeworlds that reach far beyond our own and extends what it means to be human throughout digital and other landscapes.

Unlike Deleuze and Guatarri, who are perhaps overly preoccupied with unearthing the lines of flight and other rhizomatic ways of getting out of stagnant ways of being, Smith pauses to recognizes the impact of that which is left behind, that which we can never regain. Deleuze and Guatarri ground language within embodiment, as being immediate, meaningful, and material; and in their classic theorization of schizophrenia, the person with schizophrenia is the ultimate producer (to use capitalist terms) because he can walk down a street and almost immediately incorporate his observations within a creative stream of conscious monologue.[494] The private language of affect is immediately public through embodiment, and they trust that such language or other lines of flight will somehow have a positive, generative effect in creating a line of flight away from the mundane. However, as people, like those in TIP, generate new languages about their lived experiences, there must be some way for them to remain connected and rooted within some form of solidarity. For if they all continued to talk past each other (as people with Deluezian schizophrenia might), rhizomatic assemblages of online forums, social media, in-person mutual-support groups, etc. could not hold. And since this group has

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[493] Mick Smith, "Ecological Community, the Sense of the World," 21.

[494] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London, UK and New York City, NY: Continuum, 2008 [1984]), 2.

held space (albeit in a number of iterations) for well over a decade, they must be able at some level to recognize each other's shared experience, communicate with each other, and work together towards a loosely defined trajectory to create alternative languages for discussing diverse mental states.

Within the failure to be heard, the failure to be listened to, and the failure to listen—there is a sense of loss that permeates the challenges of communication, internally and communally. And yet, perhaps it is within this sense of loss Smith articulates, that TIP retains some shape and coherence. Drawing from Jean-Luc Nancy's writing on the limits of communities, Smith discusses loss as a way to reflect on what came before, to call a community as such only after they have transformed into something else. He writes, "This pointless and irredeemable loss [in the senseless event of extinction] touches some of us in ways that reveal the infinite complications in trying to specify what is left in the wake of the death (finitude) of an entire mode of being(s)."[495] Not in the possibilities of novel, manic forms of creativity—those beautiful lines of flight does the group find shape and form, but the threat of extinction—the threat of the sun melting their wings—that spurs its contributors to come together, to find a sense of community in the face of death and destruction.

….

Daedalus—a renown craftsmen, artist, and inventor of wings made of feathers and wax—could not save his son from drowning in the ocean. Icarus, the boy who risked everything, found his bliss in flight, yet lacked the patience to find his balance and wisdom to discern how near or far to fly from the Sun. Without proper use, the technology melted and failed. Likewise, the story of TIP could be read as one of glorious, manic starts, followed by series of overwhelming failures and depression from a lack of insight into the limitations of the technologies utilized…

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[495] Mick Smith, "Ecological Community, the Sense of the World,"

Perhaps that rendering of the myth, though, does violence in itself. Perhaps we were too quick to make Icarus a hero? Perhaps we have placed too much responsibility on a boy to fly to ills he knew not of—to reach a delicate balance between life and death? Rather, attention must be drawn to the heat of the Sun, the treacherous winds at great heights, and the deadly waters below. Perhaps the prison-like maze of an island or the precarious freedom of flight are rather illusionary in their differences; and perhaps the greatest insight to be gleaned from the tale is that we are all haunted by our environments—by the social, economic, and political pathologies and rigid binaries that define the sane and insane, the stable and the unstable.

Instead, we must recognize how inherently fragile and precarious our mental and technological states are—to recognize that the desire to command and control ourselves through our technologies is a foolish wish to avoid our inevitable finitude. As articulated here by Daniel Price, there is something rather courageous and very honest about the attempt to fly away from the island and face headlong the risk of falling towards death,

> …without pity or pathos, let us affirm that whether or not recognition happens, we all eventually die, for our worldly existence is not permanent, and there is no other existence given to us; our transcendence, if any is offered at all, pertains only to these embodied movements of beginning, movements of nothing, when we risk everything, and are sure to lose—sure that the beginning will have been nothing, will have begun and ended with nothing.[496]

And if there is heroism to be found in this myth, perhaps it lies within the call to respond to death, to contemplate dandelions and their rooting systems, to search for patterns in the clouds, to tell Icarus's story again and again, to grapple with the void his loss brought about, to live dangerously within the remnants of his legend, and to love those who attempt to fly with abandon.

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[496] Daniel Price, Introduction to *The Movement of Nothingness,* 8.

## Epilogue

In May 2015, I returned to Asheville after leaving the field site almost four months before. Spring came early this year. The winter was brought with it over a foot of snow and dozens of freezing nights, but by March, locals were tilling their garden beds and planting crops for the season. Last night, my former housemates and I decided to camp out in the mountains. Wind through the trees, the sound of water rushing down a waterfall nearby, and the cool air woke me from my slumber. I turned over in my sleeping bag and saw a clear sky full of stars. Half asleep, I looked up at the night sky and thought about something that seemed like an essential addition to the theory section of this dissertation (although now the idea now escapes me). Later, as the Sun rose and revealed the misty shape of mountaintops once again clothed in green-leafed trees. The dogwood trees, mountain laurels, and cherry trees are abloom along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and soon, wild blueberries will be ripe enough for the picking.

Robin, one of my friends and research participants from ARMHC, is moving back to Florida, their state of origin. We are throwing a going-away party for them on a Tuesday, during the time the group used to meet for check-in and discussion. The following Tuesday, a few people from ARMHC will come together to make art and attempt a different way of being mad together. A couple others have left the group, disenchanted with the idea that it ever be beneficial to their mental states. Elsewhere, the Icarus staff recently lost another staff person, and the organization is down to three part-time workers and four local chapters (from its fifteen chapters in the U.S. a few months prior). They are almost out of funding for the year and have begun posting fundraising campaigns on their Facebook page through Indiegogo.com and asking their membership for financial support. TIP remains tenuous and unstable as ever—yet it lingers. Despite the many instances of loss and disintegration, its idea(l)s still find new ground to take root and grow.

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# Vita

Erica Fletcher was born in Webster, Texas, on December 16, 1990, to Jung Hua and David Russell Fletcher. Before her work as a graduate research assistant at UTMB, she was an undergraduate research assistant at the University of Houston, an intern at The Women's Fund for Health Education and Research, and a debate judge for local middle school and high school competitions in the Greater Houston region.

<u>Education</u>

B.S., Anthropology and Sociology, B.S., Psychology, May 2011, University of Houston, Houston, TX

<u>Publications</u>

<u>Fletcher, Erica</u>. "Dis/Assembling Schizophrenia on YouTube: Theorizing an Analog Body in a Virtual Sphere." Journal of Medical Humanities. (Available online June 6, 2014): 1-18.

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Permanent address: 6160 Sheffield Lane, League City, Texas 77573

This dissertation was typed by Erica Fletcher.