

Healing the Mind through the Power of Story: the Promise of Narrative Psychiatry

Lewis Mehl-Madrona, MD, PhD

Coyote Institute for Studies of Change and
Transformation, and the Union Institute &
University,

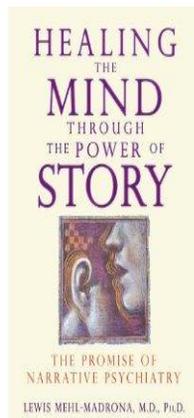
P.O. Box 578, Brattleboro, Vermont 05302

mehlmadrona@gmail.com

www.mehl-madrona.com

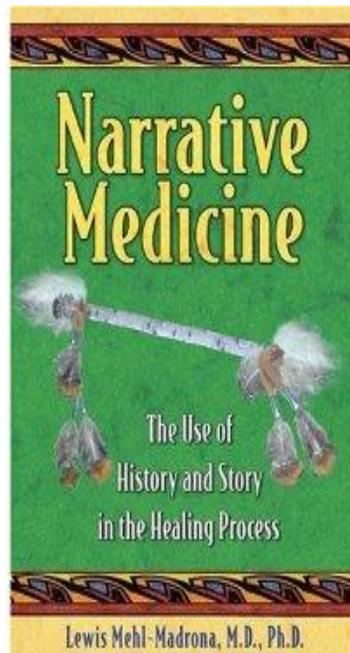
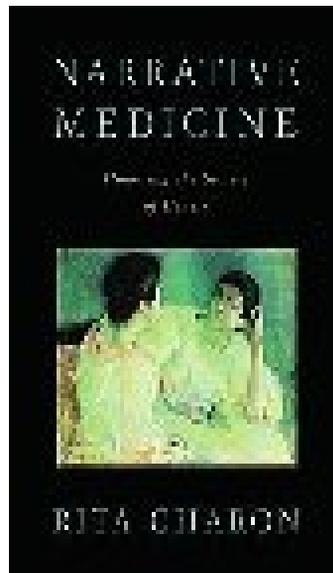
802-254-0152 ext 8402

Fax: 802-419-3720



To download the
handout, go to
[www.mehl-
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onto the page for
“Handouts”.

Visit my blog at <http://www.futurehealth.org> and join
live Coyote Conversations Thursdays at Noon EST
at <http://tui.acrobat.com/mehlmadrona>.





The people emerged into a misty valley, the fog so thick that they couldn't see anything but pillars of fires in the four directions



The people had to make a decision, so they chose the red fire of the North which warmed the people and enabled the plants to grow, teaching the people to respect all the elements of nature.



Should the people fail in their respect for nature and neglect the ceremonials, the people would disappear from the land and it would fall beneath the water of the ocean.



This is where I grew up.



This is my lake – Lake Cumberland.



This is where my grandfather and I went fishing.



Typical Cherokee village from Cherokee Nation Museum, Cherokee, North Carolina.



Painting of the 3 Cherokee leaders who visited England in 1730.



Cherokee method of fishing using a stick



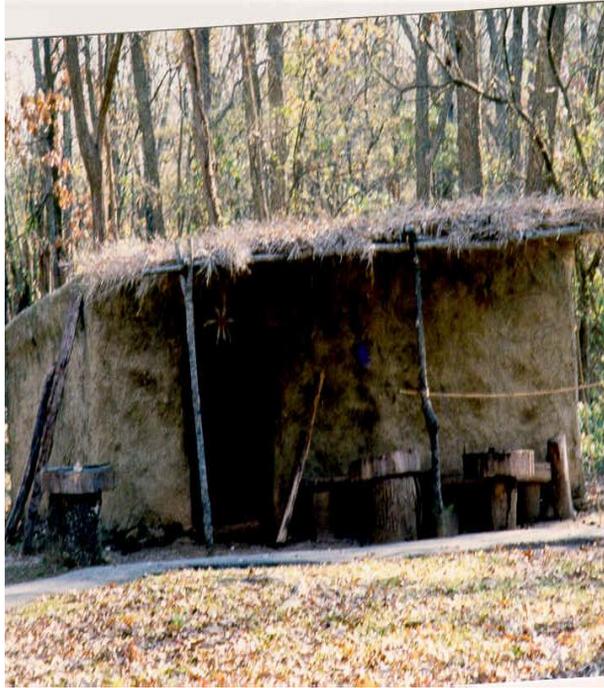
The "Trail of Tears and Death" from Tennessee to Oklahoma



John Ross, Chief of the Cherokee Nation during the Trail of Tears



Green Corn Ceremony



Cherokee Home.



Photo of Cherokee people in Kentucky taken from the North Carolina collection of Cherokee Cultural Archives.



This is where my father came from. He and my mother met while he was in the U.S. Air Force, stationed in Kentucky. They met at a USO dance.



This is the church in the town where my father grew up.



Genetically perhaps I'm inclined to love the prairies.



So are they! Please see the story of Jumping Mouse in Coyote Medicine for more details.



This topology is just down the road.



Sunset in South Dakota.



Wounded Knee, South Dakota.



Jingle Dance at the Oglala Pow Wow on Pine Ridge Reservation 2006.



How to keep lunch fresh around Wounded Knee!



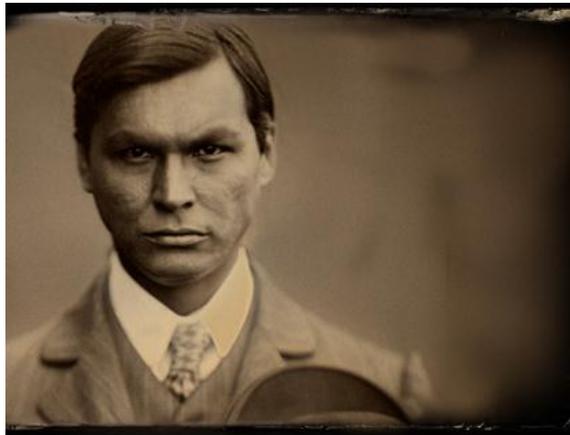
The Prairie around Wounded Knee.



The Wounded Knee Memorial



Dr. Charles Alexander Eastman ([Sioux: *Ohiyesa*](#), *(pronounced Oh hee' yay suh)*, [February 19, 1858 - January 8, 1939](#)) was a [Native American](#) author, physician and reformer. He was active in politics and helped found the [Boy Scouts of America](#).



Adam Beach portraying Dr. Charles Eastman in the HBO movie, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*.

What is Narrative?

Action from a beginning to an end.

Embodied in location and in characters.

Conveying a meaning or message (what is the point of the story?).

Conveys values and emotion.

Plausible and engaging to an audience for a purpose.

Mehl-Madrona, 2010



“Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and nowhere has there been a people without narrative.”

“All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds.”

Roland Barthes



Stories are used extensively for human communication; both the comprehension and production of oral and written narratives constitute a fundamental part of our experience.



Raymond Mar, Ph.D.

“Narrative organizes not just memory, but the whole of human experience—not just the life stories of the past, but all of one’s life as it unfolds.”

“Narrative constructs our notion of reality; the experience of life takes on meaning when we interact with it as an ongoing story.”



*Jerome Bruner, PhD and
M. Turner, PhD*

AI Scientist Roger Schank:

- To be without stories means to be without memories, which means something like being without a self.



The storytelling we experience as an event in life can lose its appearance as narrative by virtue of its integration in life.

We are so used to having conversations that function as stories that we pay little attention to their nature.



*Kay Young, Ph.D. and
Jeffrey L. Saver, M.D.*

The core mystery in the psychology of language is:

How we compose narratives by blending an infinite variety of impressions with a sense of agency—of actors doing things with purpose and emotion, seeking and evaluating goals in a world of territories, places, objects and natural events, as well as animals and people

(Turner, 1996;
Fauconnier, 2003).



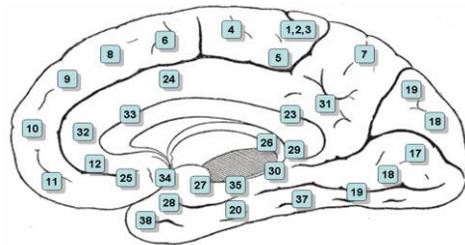
MacIntyre, Vygotsky, Trevarthan:

“Through the hearing and telling of stories, children learn what a child and what a parent is, who populates the world around them and what the ways of the world are.”



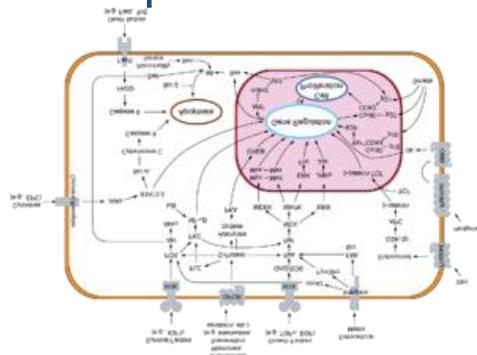
Trevarthan (2001):

“Body-mapping mechanisms emerge in the embryo CNS, before peripheral sensory and motor nerves connect the brain to the body receptors and muscles, and core brain systems exercise a primary influence over the formation of the cerebral cortex in the fetus.”



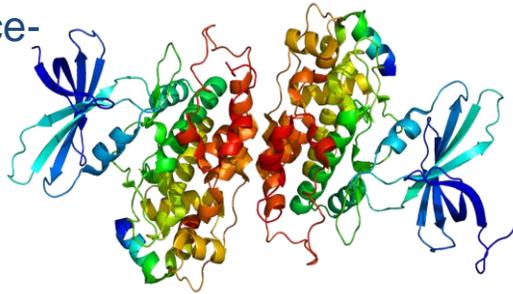
Trevarthan (2001):

“Intercellular communication regulated by gene expression forms systems in the fetal brain that will 'mirror' other persons' actions in the infant.”



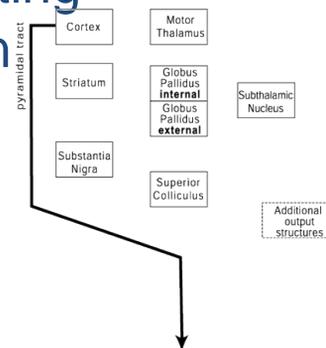
Trevarthan (2001):

Aminergic neural regulators of internal physiological state and of brain morphogenesis in utero are identical with the Intrinsic Motive Formation and Emotional Motor System that shape and pace both expressions of communication and the experience-dependent elaboration of cognitive systems post-natally.



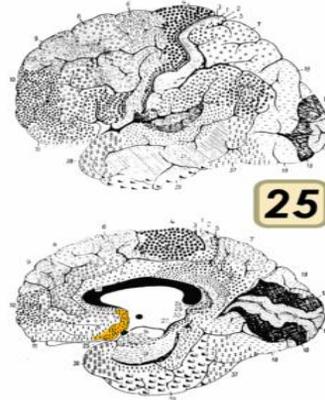
Trevarthan (2001):

A neural mechanism adapted for cognitive assimilation of socio-emotional information 'brain-to-brain', and for transmitting knowledge and skills in a cultural context, is laid down prenatally.



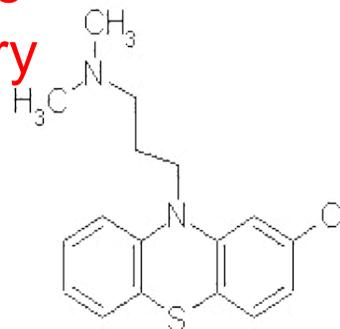
Trevarthan (2001):

“Communicating infants actively adapt to human movements in regulated rhythmic patterns. sympathetically mirroring expressions that indicate motives of intersubjective relating.”



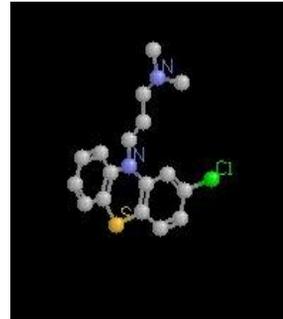
Trevarthan (2001):

“The motives for intersubjective relating to a parent's intuitive sympathetic communications are powerful anticipatory forces in mental growth.”



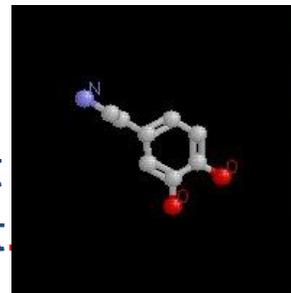
Trevarthan (2001):

“A subject's purposes and attentions for finding and choosing experience outside the body can be communicated only by mirroring of the control of somatic muscles that move the body and focus receptors on goal objects..”



Trevarthan (2001):

The combined operation of visceral and somatic mirror reactions gives the infant access to the other subject's anticipatory 'motor images', and permits direct motive-to-motive engagement with a companion, and interest in a shared environment.



Trevarthan (2001):

A psychobiology of childhood that takes account of the development in communication of the emotionally-motivated child, with attention to the whole human brain, contrasts with present theory of developmental cognitive neuroscience that continues to be individualistic, rational and cortico-centric.

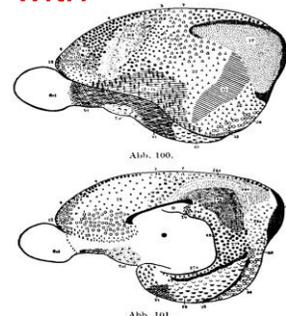


Abb. 100 und 101. BRODMANN'S cytoarchitektonische Hirnkarte des Kaninchens. Die Numerierung der Felder entspricht der Numerierung auf der Hirnkarte des Menschen von BRODMANN Abb. 9 und 7.

“We need to tell someone else a story that describes our experience because the process of creating the story also creates the memory structure that will contain the gist of the story for the rest of our lives”.



Roger Schank, PhD

“While we will not hold onto the words of the telling, our retention of the story’s core will make a cognitive space or an environment for thought that can be drawn upon when the gist of the story serves a new purpose.”



Roger Schank, PhD

Stories:

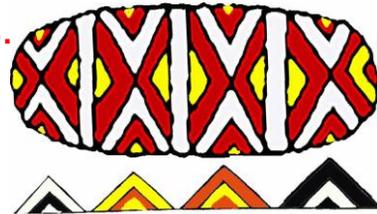
- Give cognitive and emotional significance to experience
- Provide a means of constructing and negotiating a social identity,
- give moral weight and existential significance to actions and events.



Stories direct our attention:

The [human brain](#) is limited in its ability to process information, and simultaneous processing cannot occur without a substantial cost.

Shifting of attention is necessary because it allows us to redirect attention to aspects of the environment we want to focus on, and subsequently process.



Stories direct our attention:

When an object or area is attended, processing operates more efficiently. We are limited by the size of our visual field.

With multiple objects in a scene, only some may show up in our field of vision at one time.

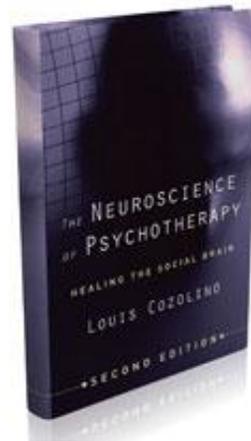
The eyes, along with one's attention must constantly be moved and, in a sense, refocused.



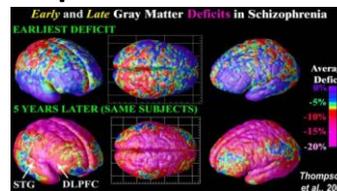
Louis Cozolino, PhD, 2010:

The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy: Healing the Social Brain, Second Edition

Change comes from combinations of empathy, affect regulation, construction of narrative, and behavioral experiments, resulting in the development and healthy integration of multiple neural networks.



Both indigenous and post-modern thought:

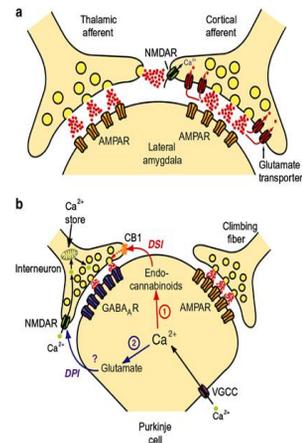


Truth is not 'out there' waiting to be discovered and measured, leading to rules and regularities, but is constructed by people interacting with their environment, always provisional and contingent on context and relationship.

Pasupathi, 2001:

Emphasizes a process in which we attribute meanings to events and create a story to contain and explain our experience.

Our knowledge of 'reality' is a story we tell ourselves.

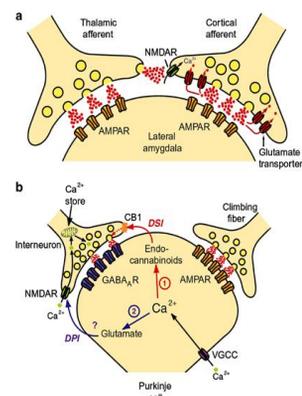


Pasupathi, 2001:

Two principles govern our personal story:

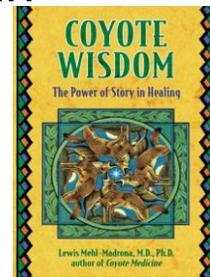
1) Co-construction (the joint influence of speakers and contexts on conversational reconstructions of personal events.

2) Consistency (the influence of a conversational recounting on subsequent memory.



For cultural examples, see Ethan Watters, *Crazy Like Us*, 2010:

- Anorexia comes to Hong Kong
- PTSD comes to Sri Lanka
- Schizophrenia comes to Zimbabwe
- The marketing of depression in Japan



Objective ≠ Subjective:

Case of young schizophrenic man for whom his best year on objective measures was the most miserable year of his life, the year he was traumatically rejected by his family and felt terribly abandoned.



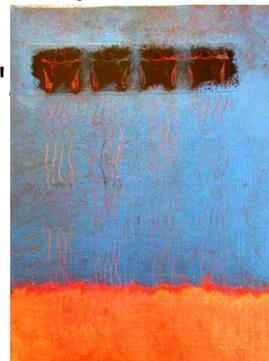
Every symptom tells a story:

- Psychopathology may be the product of what remains healthy in a person seeking to make sense of, and give expression to, what has gone wrong.
- Symptoms can be seen as the efforts of a healthy self to find words and meanings that adequately express an individual's struggle with altered experiences.



Hunter, 1991:

- A narrative stance attributes significance to each account, without seeking to reduce one to the other (explanatory pluralism).
- "The subjective, personal, patient story and the interpretative, scientific, medical story are not translations of each other but independently co-existing narratives"



Nancy's Story:

- Nancy believes she is turning into a man.
- She believes this with great conviction and is tormented by it.
- Sometimes she feels that ending her life will be the only way of dealing with this horrible predicament.
- Her husband and sister, with whom she lives, find her inconsolable as they try to point out the impossibility of her belief, but this only adds to the tension and frustration they live with, for she knows it is true.
- In an agonised way she speaks of being ugly, malformed – a freak, unlovely and unlovable – and wishes she had never been born.
- She speaks of feeling a burden to her loved ones and that it would be better if she were dead, leaving them free to get on with their lives.



Nancy's Story:

- On a few occasions she has also spoken confidentially of her complex suffering, which arose on unexpectedly returning from work to find her husband and sister having sex; of the need to continue working to support both of them ("a year of torment"); of her distress at never having had children; of not feeling a proper woman; and of not knowing what goes on at night, as she has slept in a separate room from her husband for many years.



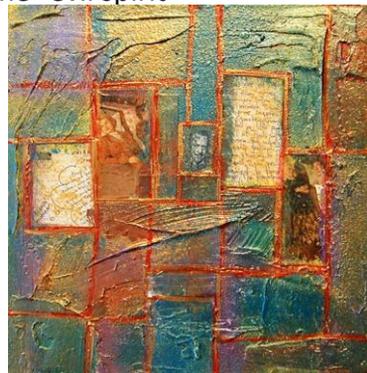
Nancy's Story:

- **Knowing something of her personal history appears to shed light on her otherwise 'mad' and 'bizarre' beliefs, and, regardless of whether this could be used directly in treatment, it gives a sense of meaningfulness and context to her life and illness.**



Indigenous narrativity:

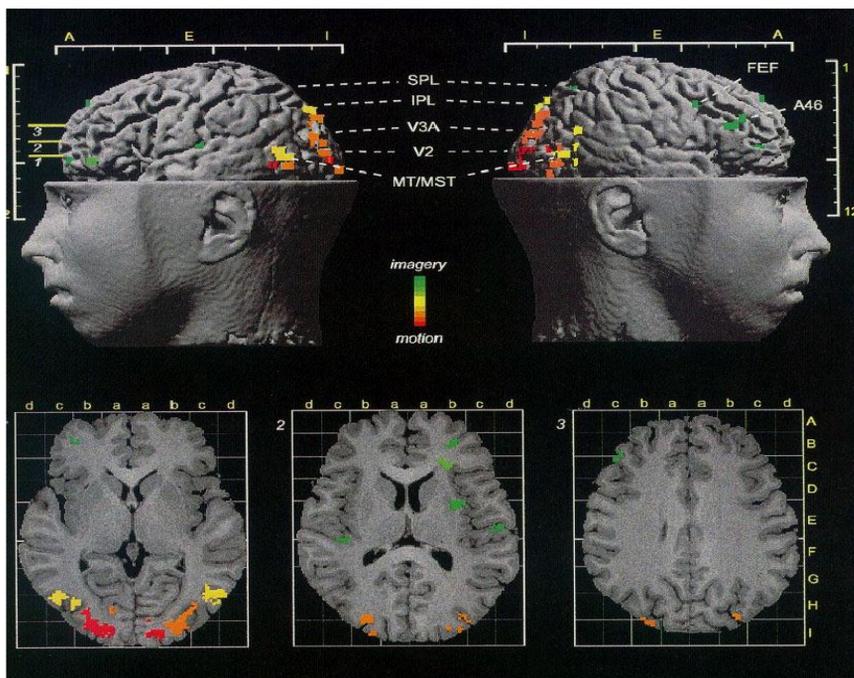
- Every symptom has a spirit within in or standing behind it, breathing onto it like a wind to fuel its fire.
- To understand an illness or a symptom, we must hear its story.
- To heal an illness, we must negotiate with the teller of its story.
- Simplistically this has been translated as the "evil spirit" metaphor.



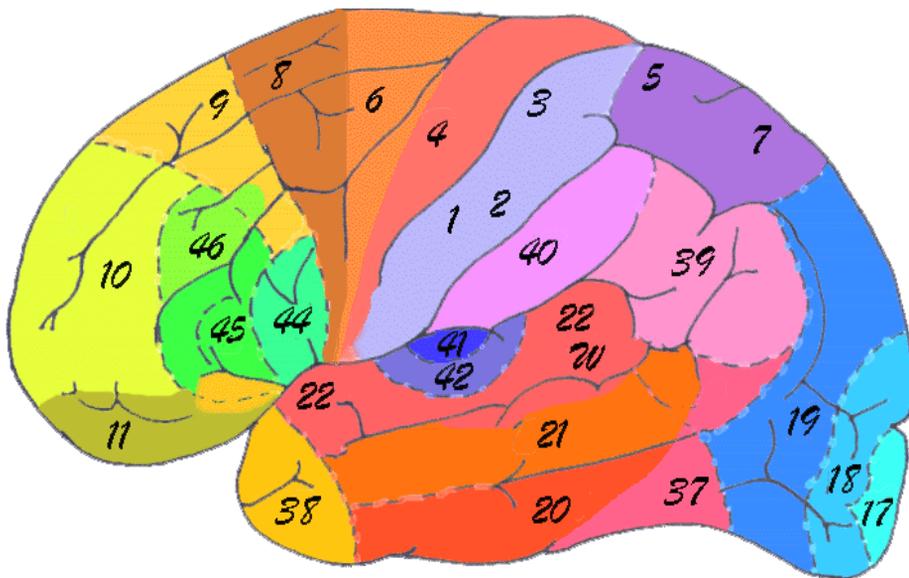
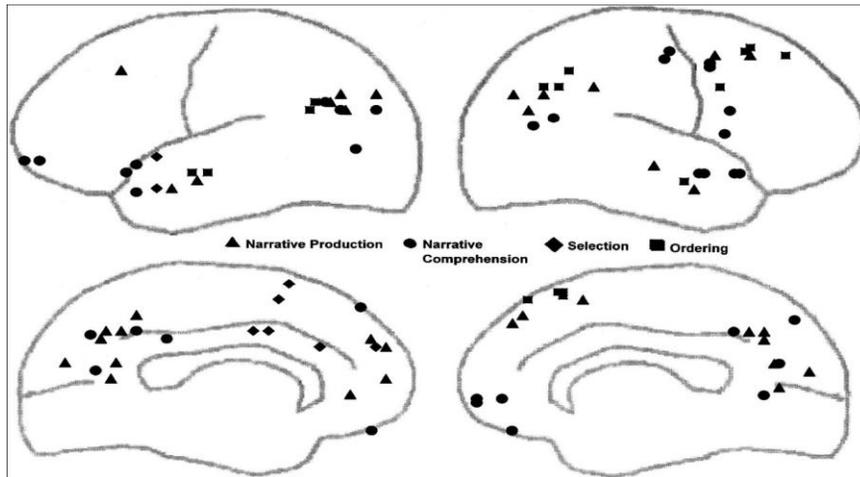
In this functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study, areas that responded to **real motion but not while motion was being imagined** are shown in red, and **areas that were active during motion imagery but not to real motion** are shown in green. **Areas that were active in both conditions** appear as orange & yellow (Thompson & Kosslyn, 2000).

Note that the areas unique to imaginary movement are in the frontal cortex and temporal cortex in the brain's story production and comprehension areas.

Visualizing movement



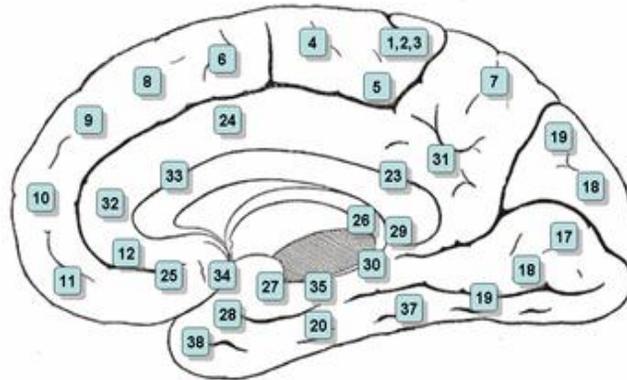
Reported peak activations for studies of narrative comprehension, narrative production, selection and ordering:



Brodman's Areas

Potential Brain Areas Predicted by Cognitive Models:

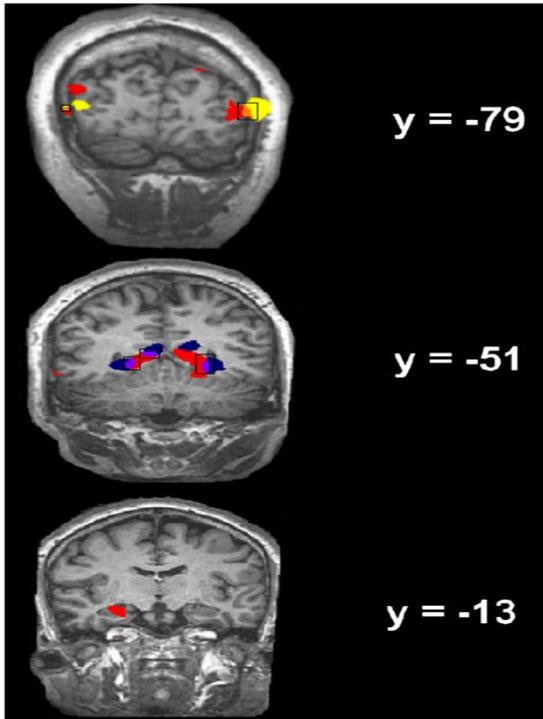
Broadman's Areas



Coronal slices showing activity during hallucinations and localizer scans. The images show the overlay maps (from top to bottom).

Color code: **red=hallucinations**; **yellow=body localizer**, **blue=scene localizer**; **overlap hallucinations – body localizer=orange** (marked with a black square in top image), **violet=overlap hallucinations – scene localizer** (marked with a black square in middle image). The left side of the images shows the right side of the brain.

Visual hallucinations



(Thompson & Kosslyn, 2000):

Level of the bilateral inferior temporal and middle occipital gyrus

Level of the parahippocampal gyrus

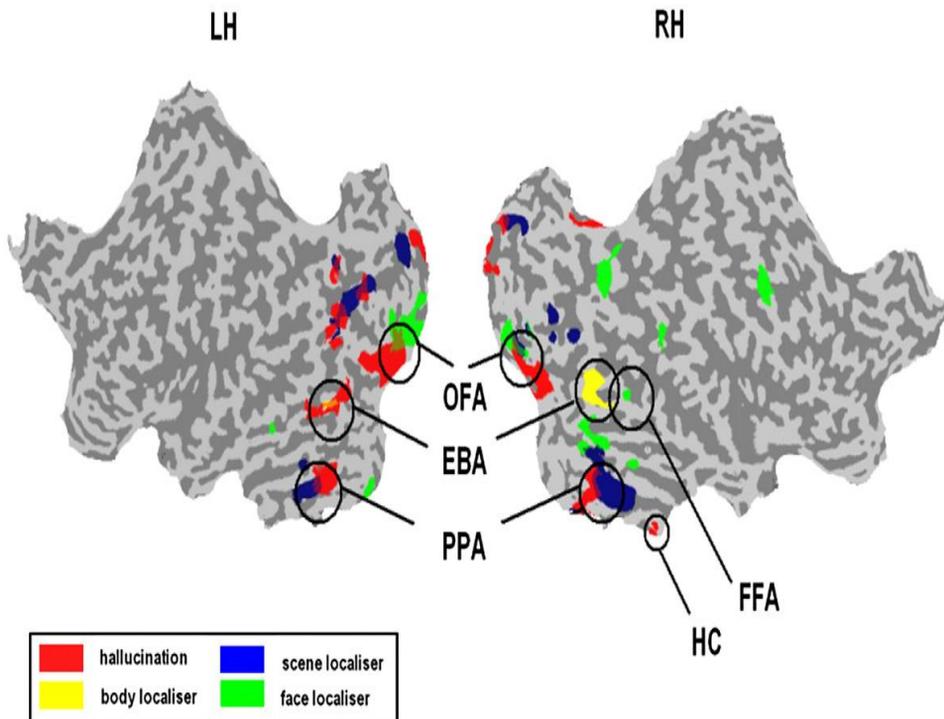
Level of the hippocampus.

Cortical activation maps (displayed on a flatmap of the patient's anatomy) of the patient during hallucination button press condition and localizer condition. From left to right: (LH) flatmap of the patient's left hemisphere with the frontal pole pointing to the left, (RH) flatmap of the patient's right hemisphere with the frontal pole pointing to the right.

Color code : red=hallucination button press, yellow=body localizer condition, blue=scene localizer condition, green=face localizer condition.

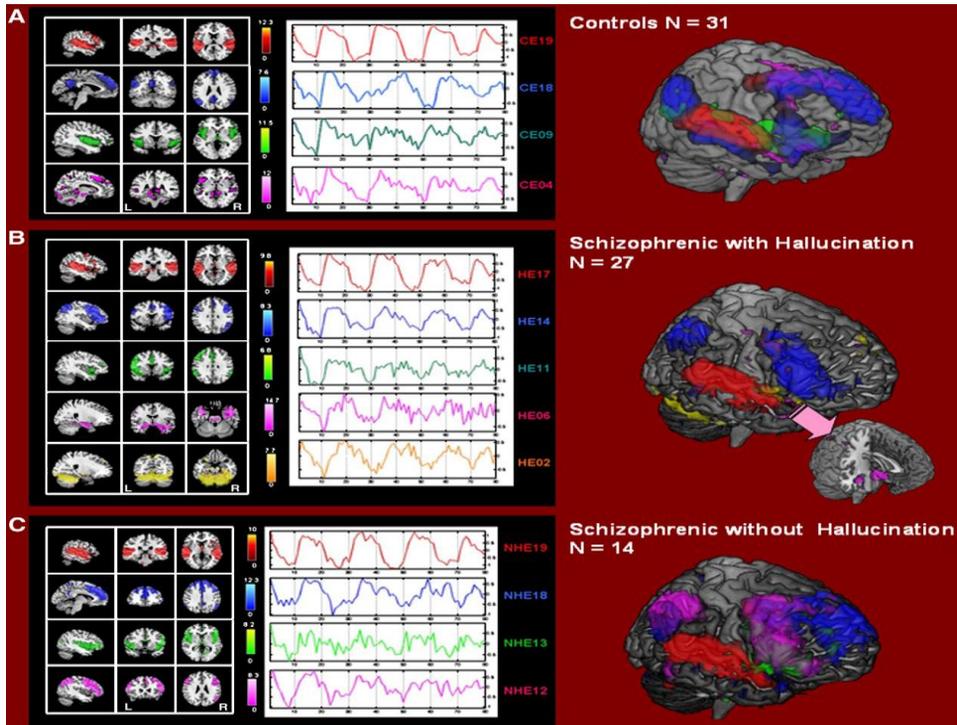
OFA = occipital face area, FFA = fusiform face area, PPA= parahippocampal place area, EBA = extrastriate body area, HC = hippocampus.

Seeing Visions



Components of Interest (COI's) identified during emotional sessions. The COI's are the representative mean spatial maps of each group (A: controls, B: patients with Hallucinations and C: patients without Hallucinations). Abbreviations: (CE19) Temporal, (CE18) Fronto-temporo-parietal, (CE09) Subcortical-fronto-temporal, (CE04) Cerebelloccipital; (HE17) Temporal; (HE14) Fronto-parietal; (HE11) Fronto-temporal; (HE06) Limbic: parahippocampal-amygdalar; (HE02) Occipito-cerebellar. (NHE19) Temporal, (NHE18) Frontal, (NHE13) Subcortical-temporal-frontal, (NHE12) Parieto-frontal.

Hearing Voices



Roberts, 1999:

- The attribution of meaning to the alarming and threatening experience of pre-psychosis brings relief.
- For some people the further elaboration of these delusional meanings into systems of belief may be accompanied by an enhanced sense of me
- IP: Experience gets organized with the help of random and sometimes malevolent energies, not necessarily on the side of the people.



Roberts, 1999; Mehl-Madrona, 2010:

- The action of creating narrative, by attaching words to experiences so that they can be made sense of, forms part of the wider action of responding appropriately to a situation – narratization is necessary for life.
- The psychotherapy for psychosis consists of helping people to deconstruct their non-working narratives or to construct more sensible narratives of meaning that permit them to live in the world with less suffering.



Laing, 1964:

- “The mad things done and said by the schizophrenic will remain essentially a closed book if one does not understand their existential context”.
- Today, we could say that the mad things done and said make sense within the stories the person is living and that are being performed through and upon them.
- Social justice consists in developing an awareness of the stories that are forced upon us; those that we are made to perform.



Meaning of Voices:

- A simple example is that of a very withdrawn, inarticulate young man, who took considerable time to reveal that his 'voices' threatened to desecrate his daughter's grave.
- This admission eventually enabled an understanding of his guilt and grief at the breakdown of his family and the death of his young daughter.



Meaning of Voices:

- A more complex example is that of a woman tormented by demeaning and deriding voices telling her to cut herself, as she was "a lump of meat".
- Like Mollica's (1988) torture victims, it took her a long time to develop sufficient trust and confidence to tell her 'trauma story', but telling it gave considerable insight into how she had lost her identity and had become just "a lump of meat".



Opalanga (from Estes, 1992: 201):

Opalanga was a very tall, slender woman, who as a child, in addition to being mocked for her height, was told that the gap between her front teeth was the sign of a liar.

However, as an adult she visited The Gambia and found some of her ancestral people.

Among their tribe were many who were very tall and slender, with gaps between their front teeth.

This gap, they told her, was called *sakaya yallah* ('opening of God') and was a sign of wisdom.



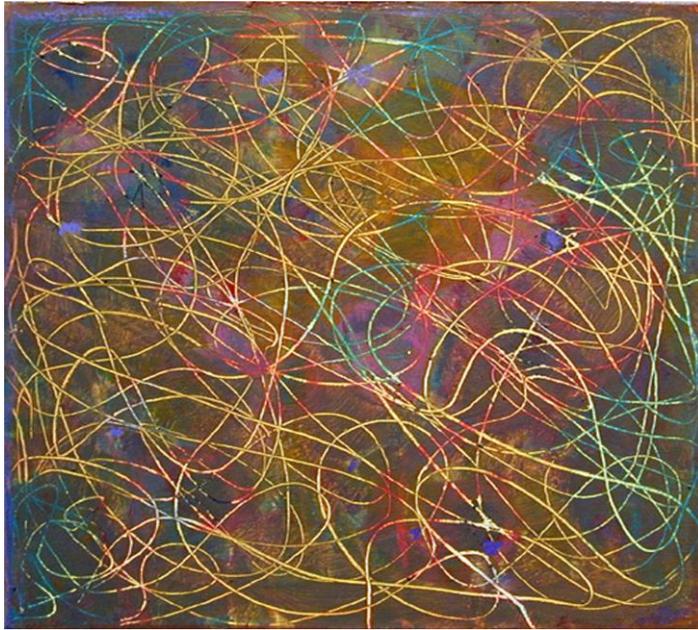
Detoxification and Revision of Narrative:

"(Her) stories which began as experiences both oppressive and depressive, end with joy and a strong sense of self.

Opalanga understands that her height is her beauty, her smile one of wisdom, and that the voice of God is always close to her lips".

This is an example of how easily we become 'caught in a story' and that the toxicity of attributions is all the more if they are told to us early and authoritatively.





Strings by San Meredith, Convergence Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

Jaspers, 1974:

A narrative view values content, and in seeking to understand delusions and hallucinations, as opposed to explaining them, one is engaged in re-contextualizing the illness in the life experience of the individual.

Roberts, 1999; Mehl-Madrona, 2010:

This in turn may inform recovery and give insight into its complexities, which may include the loss of the compensations of delusional beliefs and re-engagement with the implications of having a severe mental illness and what preceded it.

Recovery may involve an initially painful loss of meaning and uniqueness that gives rise to a benefit of greater connectedness and wholeness but not without a painful bridge from isolated but meaningful uniqueness and superiority to connected, nurturing, but ordinary relationships with others.

Example from General Medicine (Beth):

- Mass found in her brain; cancer likely.
- She calls wanting to explore alternative treatments in the case it was cancer.
- She was reflecting upon her life psychologically as creating a fertile ground for cancer and thought it had something to do with her father – a problematic relationship throughout.
- First step: life story interview (see Dan MacAdams, Northwestern University)
 1. Imagine your life as a novel.
 2. What are the chapter headings of your life. What are the significant events (peak and nadir experiences)?
 3. What are the turning points from childhood, adulthood, and adolescent?
 4. What do they say about you?



Example from General Medicine (Beth):

From the life story interview, she discovered:

- Father died of stroke; they never said good-bye.
- Her mother never stopped reminding her about how brilliant her father was and how she could never hold a candle to him.
- Her grandmother had three strokes and then drowned herself.
- Her grandmother raised her after her father died in the war
- Her mother humiliates her for pretending to be sick

Life Story Interview, continued

5. What are the most positive and most negative influences on you?
6. What is your greatest life challenge?
7. With what stories do you identify most?
8. Give two futures – one positive, one negative.
9. What's your spiritual approach?



Example from General Medicine (Beth):

From our guided imagery session:

- She felt that she didn't deserve to live.
- She felt embarrassed that people came out to support her.
- She felt like she needed to have a bad cancer now or people would be disappointed.
- She felt that her defective
- brain was destined to kill her.

Throughout her childhood, she felt that she had a defective brain.

Throughout her life she feared that her brain would break and that she would die or become a vegetable.

Her worst fear was the "locked-in" syndrome. The Butterfly and the Bell Jar gave her a panic attack.



Coyote goes “Down Under” The Secret: Peanut Butter



Modern Day Sweat Lodge



A view of the inside of a sweat lodge



A 19th Century Lakota Sweat



The Big Picture of a Cree (Alberta)
Sweat Lodge (19th Century)



“Crow’s Eye View” of a Modern
Sweat Lodge



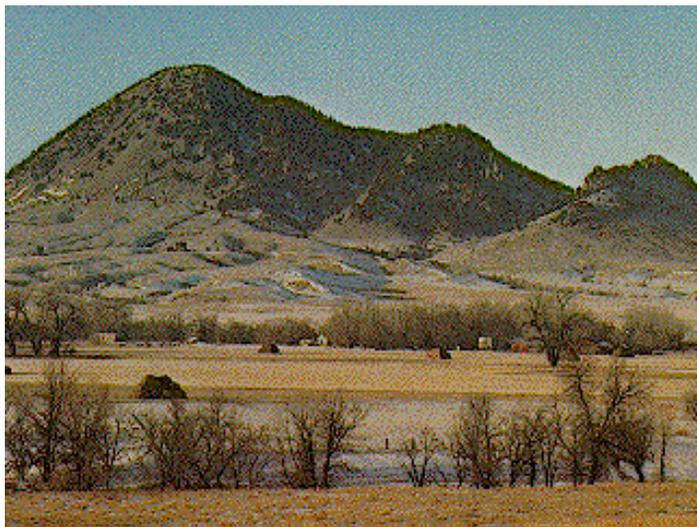
Fire Pit and Alter of a Modern Sweat Lodge



Men Cooling Off after Sweat (19th Century)



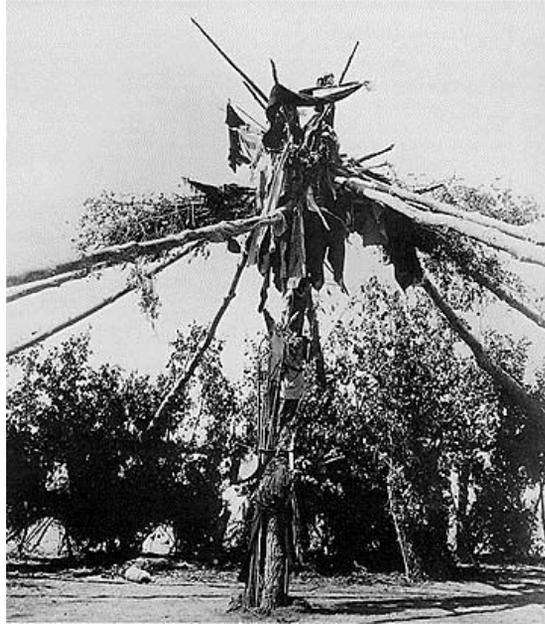
View of the Stone People (Peta Oyasin)



Bear Butte, Lakota Sacred Mountain

“Visions, a world beyond the frog-skin world...”

-- Archie Lane Deer



The Sun Dance Tree of Life



Lakota Drawing of the Sun Dance



Sitting around the Arbour



Today's Arbour



Another Way to Pierce



Earlier Renditions of the Sun Dance



Variations on the Sun Dance

Resources:

- [My web site:](#)
<http://www.mehl-madrona.com>
- Open discussion group:
<http://groups.google.com/group/coyotewisdom>
- Aboriginal Mind and Mental Health discussion group and resource page:
- <http://groups.google.com/group/aboriginalmind>.

Resources:

- Integrative Psychiatry On-Line textbook:
<http://groups.google.com/group/integrativepsychiatry>.
- On-line forum and resources for traditional culturalhealing:
<http://groups.google.com/group/culturalandtraditionalhealthandhealing>.
- Evolving website: www.coyoteinstitute.us
(Coyote Institute (for Studies of Change and Transformation)).

Lewis Mehl-Madrona, MD, PhD

Coyote Institute for Studies of Change and
Transformation

P.O. Box 578, Brattleboro, Vermont 05302

mehlmadrona@gmail.com

www.mehl-madrona.com

808-772-1099

Fax: 802-419-3720