

Revisiting Janet Cardiff's Central Park Audio Walk as an Ophelian Performance and Representation

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I first encountered Janet Cardiff's audio walks during a performance-making course at Barnard College in spring 2009. At the time, I was at one of the high points (so to speak) of my winding journey with a visitor I refer to as 'The Thing,' an incestuous sort of hybrid between bipolar disorder and major depression, which manifested most frequently in three to four sleepless nights followed by a crash of one to two weeks. My manic periods had a certain strange rhythm to them, combining productivity with a respectable degree of madness: I would obsessively digest poetry and articles and complete the work I hadn't looked at for weeks in a number of hours, punctuated by frequent breaks comprised of midnight runs through the halls of my dorm, shame-laced food binges, 3 A.M. walks from Morningside Heights to Columbus Circle and back, and, occasionally—due in part to long-term cumulative sleep deprivation—mild dissociative episodes and auditory hallucinations underscored with violent imagery that was as menacing as it was familiar. Flirting with self-destructiveness and dystopian visions but never going the whole nine yards, I walked the line between obsession and necessary productivity, mere self-absorbed postadolescent eccentricity and unfiltered psychosis. I learned to think of these episodes as walking nightmares in which I was an active participant, sometimes resisting the shadow-figures that accompanied them, sometimes learning from them, and sometimes becoming altogether immersed, only to emerge freshly numbed after a hangover period that was not unlike having your thoughts themselves plucked from the dark recesses of an intoxicated mind, herded into a fluorescently lit room, and plunged into the ice-cold water of quotidian logic.

The class—billed as an 'alternative theatre lab'—was four hours long, every Friday, which was often one of my numbest days after a week of flailing

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through a socially acceptable level of presentability. On one of those bitterly cold February mornings, our instructor took the subway with us to a wintry corner of Central Park and gave each of us 60 minutes with an iPod, onto which Cardiff's 2004 audio walk "Her Long Black Hair," created specifically for Central Park South, had been downloaded. Each of us dutifully donned headphones and completed the walk, which can only be undertaken alone, while the rest of us waited. Ironically, an audio walk by the same artist who has been described as haunting, ethereal, and nonlinear in her thinking and art-making is one of my sharpest memories from that period of my life, in stark relief against the mundanity of familiar internal chaos. The practice in which I had just engaged did, however, indeed haunt me for weeks, less because of the content or tone than because I felt I'd been found out. With "Her Long Black Hair," Cardiff manages to capture the cacophonous multiplicity of internal voices alongside the unique sort of self-deprecating myopia and critical self-awareness that are required by full-fledged mental illness (and its treatment); in other words, she mirrors the mental acrobatics often experienced by the neurologically atypical (whether temporarily or as a result of longer-term mental illness) mind. Cardiff's work was not haunting to me because it was outside of my comfort zone; it hit far too close to home, even mapping a then-familiar stomping ground in an atypical way.

Moreover, Cardiff's mysterious protagonist is almost certainly an Ophelia (from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, of course, and from centuries of subsequent cultural and artistic representations of feminine madness): Driven perhaps by unrequited love, perhaps by abuse and trauma, and perhaps by an innate desire to escape captivity, Cardiff's protagonist, she implies, is liberated only by drowning herself next to a willow tree (just one of the indubitably Ophelian trappings which are attributed to her). For the purposes of this project, I plan to revisit Cardiff's piece through a close reading of the walk and my experience of it, placing Cardiff's work alongside Elaine Showalter's "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," and her call to pair close analysis (in her case, historical exploration) with Cixousian and Irigarayan approaches to feminist criticism and thought. She writes:

I would like to propose instead that Ophelia *does* have a story of her own that feminist criticism can tell; it is neither her life story, nor her love story, nor Lacan's story, but rather the *history* of her representation. This essay tries to bring together some of the categories of French feminist thought about the "feminine" with the empirical energies of American historical and critical research. (Showalter 125)

To make my argument, I will also draw from Leslie C. Dunn's "Ophelia's Songs in *Hamlet*: Music, Madness, and the Feminine." In so doing, I will analyze Cardiff's protagonist, and the walk itself, as examples of both the kind of feminist responses to Ophelia's unfortunate cultural legacy that Showalter details in her

article, and of Cixous' 'feminine writing'—that is, writing that is embodied, musical/lyrical/poetic, and which exists outside of phallogocentric language—which she outlines most succinctly in "Laugh of the Medusa." Moreover, while Cardiff's work is often described as disorienting or downright frightening (and to be sure, Cardiff's walks offer a strange brand of soothing: less lullaby, more shamanistic undertaking or quiet exorcism), I also intend to locate Cardiff's audio walks along the spectrum of contemplative practices: a kind of 'labyrinth walking *noir*' that passes a dim flashlight across the shadows that populate the binaural landscapes she conjures, allowing her audience of one an intimate, whispered, and always quietly urgent glimpse at them, rather than illuminating them fully or attempting to cast them out. This kind of contemplation, by a means reminiscent of the kind of writing Cixous urges among and between women, reveals the futility and inadequacy of attempts at narrative linearity and story-making and holds a mirror up to neurosis, anxiety, and the lies we tell ourselves about our histories, both personal and collective.

I will also 'read' "Her Long Black Hair," and my revisitation of it, as an act of 'disidentification' a la Jose Munoz, who claims, "To disidentify is to read oneself and one's life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (Munoz 5). "Her Long Black Hair" is not intended (at least not explicitly) to serve as an exercise in mindfulness, to cater to individuals and/or populations deemed neurologically 'deviant' or 'mentally ill' as its intended audience, or to articulate a message that gestures towards neurodiversity, a radical political move away from able-mindedness, or the strategic possibilities and artistic beauty of 'mad pride' and the radical mental health movement. Yet, Cardiff's "Her Long Black Hair" artistically and aesthetically privileges many of the characteristics embraced by the 'mad pride' movement (led in part by the Icarus Project) as an act of refusal of limiting categorization and the psychiatric/mental health services complex. Part of the mission statement of the Icarus Project reads that it "was created by a group of people diagnosed with Bipolar and similar diagnoses who see conditions like ours as dangerous gifts to be cultivated...rather than 'diseases' or 'disorders' needing to be cured. With these double edged blessings we have the ability to fly to places of great vision and creativity, but...we also have the potential to fly dangerously close to the sun—into realms of delusion and psychosis—and crash in a blaze of fire and confusion" (Icarus Project). In "Her Long Black Hair," though it was not created for this express purpose, Cardiff asks us to walk that self-same borderline that mirrors the cliff's edge between the normalized definition of 'sanity' and chaos, or psychosis. She literally asks us to reconsider the nature of time and reality, to suspend disbelief, to willingly put 'voices in our heads,' and to not only listen to them, but to temporarily obey them—to give ourselves over, not to the loss of self, but to the embracement of a simultaneously deeply personal and necessarily shared experience (in public space, and thus shared with others physically; and emotionally and mentally,

shared with Cardiff and the multiplicity of voices she introduces). Thus, I am able to read my experience with “My Long Black Hair” in the context of an act of disidentification—both then and now—and with the hope of moving gradually towards the possibility of an articulation of a radical mental health politic.

The walk begins with the sounds of a storm and the rustling of rain-soaked leaves. Cardiff’s voice, hushed but matter-of-fact and conspiratorial—as if she is kneeling behind a confessional or walking alongside us, doling out instructions without letting on to passers-by—emerges from the anticipatory near-silence, like a slow intake of breath: “It’s just after a rain. The streets are still wet, but I think it’s stopped for a while” (Cardiff). Her mention of the rain on any given day—when it is, of course, likely that it’s not raining at all (it was lightly snowing the day I took my walk)—establishes that not only the soundscape, but the environment itself, in which we are being immersed is binaural and multidirectional. She continues, “It’s loud here, isn’t it? When you’re in a city like New York, you have to think of all the sounds like they’re a symphony. Otherwise you go a bit crazy” (Cardiff). To demonstrate her point, she follows up this rather ominous imperative with the sounds—indeed symphonic—of birds, cabs, accordion street music, and the clip-clop of horses’ hooves on cobblestone. Here, she introduces a reading of song and music (particularly multilayered, complex, and/or symphonic music) as both an antidote to and representation of madness, an idea that Dunn introduces—and to which I will return less briefly later—as central to a deeper understanding of Ophelia’s madness (or, at least, her mad behavior) as potentially disruptive and subversive rather than an example of hysteria, unrequited love, or feminine weakness.

Almost immediately, Cardiff involves us in the work that is to be done, the explanation of which she never fully provides, in the form of a directive: “I have some photographs to show you. Take out the first one” (Cardiff). A series of photographs, allegedly (according to audio-walk-character-Cardiff) obtained at an apparently very strange flea market, and all featuring the same unknown dark-haired woman facing away from the camera, frame the walk, and are distributed to participants. As if we have no choice, Cardiff, in a move that disrupts the uneasy but familiar rhythm into which we’ve started to fall with this intimate stranger/co-conspirator, tells us to put the photograph away and suddenly says more urgently, “I hope it doesn’t rain again, because I want you to walk with me...Get up. Go to the right. Walk past the statue. Try to walk to the sound of my footsteps so that we can stay together” (Cardiff). Her voice is still quiet, but more purposeful, even a little harried. *You must stay together*. With her, I wondered? Or ‘together’ with my own footsteps, my breath in the icy air? With the others around me, unwittingly participating in this bizarre exploration of the temporarily treacherous ice-sheeted ground that caused me to step more gingerly than Cardiff’s sure-footed audible steps as she urged me on?

“There’s a woman below talking on a cell phone” (Cardiff), Cardiff informs us. (There was). “There’s a man on the bench reading the paper” (Cardiff).

(There wasn't). "I hope you see an egret. Yesterday I saw two, flying over the lake" (Cardiff). We are thus reminded that her yesterday is not our yesterday; she is speaking within and to our bodies, and is lodged between our ears, but she is not us. Cardiff begins to pontificate about the purpose of our current repetitive activity, a technique to which I often reverted when my manic or depressed mind was refusing to engage in some necessary daily task for one reason or another:

Walking is very calming. One step after another, one foot moving into the future and one in the past. Did you ever think about that? It's like our bodies are caught in the middle. The hard part is staying in the present, really being here, really feeling alive...Stop. 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005, 1006, 1007, 1008, 1009, 1010. Now everything will have changed. The people we meet, the things we hear. Not in a big way, but enough. Okay, continue. (Cardiff)

Shaken by hearing aloud the kinds of thoughts I thought were mine alone, I was startled by the sounds of footsteps, presumed to be hers; as the walk continued, they became ours, as I hurried my steps to match with them; and then: "I keep thinking I hear someone behind us" (Cardiff). "But we can't look back. It's one of the rules today"—one I had already broken several times—"He wasn't supposed to, but he did" (Cardiff). Who was *he*? Moreover, for someone already experiencing intense bouts of paranoia and anxiety, the friendly-cum-predatory footsteps were especially unnerving. Cardiff, as narrator and as acknowledged creator of the walk, establishes here that she is, perhaps, not credible: We are led to believe at first that the footsteps we hear are hers, guiding us towards an anticipated shared experience. Like horses, we sense her fear and incorporate it into our own bodies, noticing our existing tension even as it momentarily heightens. But they are, possibly, someone else's; perhaps the villain of the narrative into which Cardiff is drawing us, as well as our thoughts (which, to a certain extent, she is also curating). I began to wonder, *Where is she taking me? What are her motivations?*

After putting her own motivations—and sanity—into question, Cardiff's voice continues at the water fountain: "I want to show you another photograph. Number 2, it says. Hold it up. This is a photo I took the last time I was here. Look at it closely: the ice on the lake, the barren trees. Let yourself really go into the scene. Now look at the view in front of us... I remember that day clearly. It was really cold. You could see your breath" (Cardiff). (I could). "After walking for a few hours, I went back and had a hot bath. I cut my hair in the hotel mirror because I hated the way I looked" (Cardiff), she shares, in one of the relatively few gestures towards her own particular internal monologue or personal history, and one that links her explicitly to the Ophelia narrative that is unfolding (and to the figure of Ophelia herself). Before I had time to process this off-kilter moment of cavalier intensity, I heard a male voice whisper: "And to bind these docile lovers fast, I freeze the world in a perfect mirror" (Cardiff).

These were the words of Charles Baudelaire from his poem “Beauty,” voiced by George Bures Miller, Cardiff’s husband and longtime artistic collaborator. Here, Cardiff begins to construct a foundational canon, a set of through-lines that dance across the lit walls of the environment we are creating together. All are interlocked, but almost rebelliously loosely: They are bound more tightly only in the recesses of Cardiff’s (or her character’s?) mind, where personal trauma becomes poetry becomes a conjuring of larger social realities and collective traumas, remembered within our bodies as well as between our ears, and triggering our own traumatic memories that begin to compete with the ones Cardiff is voicing.

“It’s evening now,” Cardiff announces, destabilizing our sense of time and place once again. And after a slow breath: “I’m a bit scared, but it seems pretty safe. Another man is walking towards me, touching his own face. Can he see me?” (Cardiff). At this point I began to struggle to keep up with the narrative, still haunted as I was by the string of loosely connected trauma-links being hung up for me to pluck off a clothesline and examine, like photographs in a dark room. Almost as quickly, it’s daytime again. Different people are crying “Hello”; there’s the ring of a cell phone; Cardiff picks up to the same male voice who whispered the poem about beauty and destruction. “Where are you?” “In the park.” “Be careful in there.” “Don’t worry, there’s lots of people around. Keep to the left.” “What did you say?” “I’m just recording” (Cardiff). *How did he fit into the narrative?* I wondered. *When was this going to make sense?* And why, moreover, did it cause me so much anxiety and give me so much pleasure at the same time — pleasure at its unabashed oddness?

“She seems like a different person than me,” Cardiff continues, referring, of course, to the black-haired woman: “but somehow I have her memories” (Cardiff). *And now we do, too*, I thought. *Like a curse*. Here, Cardiff’s layering of herself onto the protagonist, in addition to her previous insertion of herself into the overall narrative concerning the loss of feminine beauty, hair, madness, and grief, echoes Showalter’s assertion that the archetype of Ophelia, and various cultural representations of her — as a hysteric, an erotomaniac, and any number of Victorian women in asylums, for example — not only symbolizes dominant cultural interpretations of femininity, womanhood, and madness, but often perpetuates and reifies those limited interpretations. Dunn, too, calls Ophelia “an archetype of both woman and madness” (50). Thus, Showalter implicitly argues, echoing Cixous, Ophelia must be rewritten not by yet another medium in dominant culture, but by women; even, perhaps, by other mad women. She writes:

If we turn from American to French feminist theory, Ophelia might confirm the impossibility of representing the feminine in patriarchal discourse as other than madness, incoherence, fluidity, or silence. In French theoretical criticism, the feminine or “Woman” is that which escapes representation in patri-

archal language and symbolism; it remains on the side of negativity, absence, and lack. (Showalter 126)

This, and Showalter's other arguments, would imply that 1) Cardiff has no choice but to represent feminine madness, unrequited love, and/or grief—all of which certainly apply to her protagonist's narrative arc—in an Ophelian fashion, and indeed that nearly all representations of feminine madness are derivative of Ophelias if they do not directly resist the archetype; and 2) that Cardiff herself, as a woman, cannot extricate herself and her tale of grief and temporary madness from the same archetype. However, by inserting herself forcibly into the narrative, rather than outright refusing the label of feminine madness, in a way that “escapes representation in patriarchal language and symbolism” (Showalter 126) by way of intentional nonlinearity, fragmentation, and disruption, Cardiff reclaims the Ophelia narrative and reworks it in what Cixous would describe as a ‘feminine’ way.

Next in the walk, Cardiff directs us to a tunnel; photograph #3 is of this tunnel exactly. She instructs us on how to line it up properly. “You can see she’s getting her hair off her face, getting ready to pose, but he took the picture too soon...like she’s still here. What happened after the camera clicked?” (Cardiff). Baudelaire, again voiced by Miller, provides something of an answer: “I shall plunge my head, adoring drunkenness, into this black ocean where the other is imprisoned” (Cardiff), from his “La Chevelure” (“Hair”). “His mistress had long black hair,” Cardiff offers. “She’s an image now too, made by his words.” (The kind we were making, of course.) This notion of Cardiff's is reminiscent once again of Showalter's repeated assertion that Ophelia is not only a representation of feminine madness, but *the* representation of feminine madness: a textual archetype that her brother Laertes describes, as noted by Dunn, as “a ‘document in madness’...Laertes is not alone in this tendency to emblemize Ophelia: Hamlet also is quick to construe her in terms of cultural stereotypes, as the ‘Woman’ whose name is frailty” (50). Hamlet's story not only overshadows Ophelia's, Showalter and Dunn argue, but makes and shapes it entirely, so that feminist scholars who have attempted to unearth Ophelia's ‘story’ have often found that there is, in fact, not one to tell. In the same vein, Showalter raises the following questions:

Insofar as Hamlet names Ophelia as “woman” and “frailty,” substituting an ideological view of femininity for a personal one, is she indeed representative of Woman, and does her madness stand for the oppression of women in society as well as in tragedy? Furthermore, since Laertes calls Ophelia a ‘document in madness,’ does she represent the textual archetype of woman *as* madness or madness *as* woman?” (Showalter 126)

Showalter's response to this feminist quandary echoes Cixous' proposal for more ‘feminine writing’—that is, not only writing done by and for women, but woman-writing itself. Cardiff's piece, which eschews linearity, pat categoriza-

tion, and coherence in favor of overlapping, multiplicity, and intentional ambiguity, is one such example. Her elusive protagonist, like Ophelia, is relentlessly pursued, but never fully captured: None of the photographs feature her face, her narrative is never fully understood, and we are offered no solutions as to her rescue or her understanding. Thus, she is fundamentally unknowable and inaccessible, due in part to the fragmented nature of her narrative. However, unknowability, Cixous implies, breeds possibility, which is one possible ‘escape’ for the perpetually trapped Ophelia. Notably, Dunn’s complaint with many scholars who have attempted to ‘read Ophelia’ is that their focus has been on unearthing the precise meaning and source of each of the snatches of scattered song and rhyme she offers up in her mad state. Dunn appears to be in line with Cixous in her understanding that this attempt places Ophelia’s expression firmly back in the realm of patriarchal phallogocentrism, symbolism, and logical meaning and meaning-making. Her pieces of songs, Dunn argues, are significant and expressive due to their form rather than their content: It is precisely their scattered nature that renders them inextricable from Ophelia’s particular breed of feminine madness. She writes, “An approach...which focuses on the songs’ words, assumes that their mode of performance is merely a carrier of meaning rather than a constituent. I wish to argue that Ophelia’s singing is full of meaning—indeed, perhaps *overfull*—which is precisely what makes it such a potent signifier, not only of woman and of madness, but also of music itself” (Dunn 52). Likewise, Cardiff’s protagonist’s narrative can be told only in bits and pieces, not only because she herself, and her story, are elusive, but because to do otherwise would be to limit her and to relegate her to the category of ‘just another Ophelia,’ easily read and categorized, without possibility (for either escape or further analysis).

Moving forward in the walk, Cardiff guides us to a polar bear down an alley at the Central Park Zoo. “The home range of a polar bear is normally the size of Iceland” (Cardiff), she tells us. We hear labored breathing, then the narrative of Harry Thomas, a runaway slave, whose story we can assume is peripherally connected to Cardiff’s feelings (which she never shares directly) about the fate of the captive polar bear:

I was caught and taken back again. He took me to the blacksmith’s shop where he had a ring made of iron which I wore on my right leg. I worked with it on, I slept with it on. The next morning, for punishment, the master came for me. He stripped me naked, left me across a pine log, and whipped me with a paddle. He whipped me until the paddle broke. Then he rubbed salt into the wound and sent me naked to feed the hogs in January. (Cardiff)

Slightly later—after a temporary storm—Cardiff continues. “There are always so many layers in front of my eyes. I saw a man pushing a woman into a car. I saw a boy running down the street. I saw a woman fall to the ground. How can I really know what I’ve seen?” she asks, calling into question the validity of this

experience as well. Perhaps in conversation with the earlier slave narratives, or perhaps in reference to the swirl of karmic burdens we seem to be wading through as we walk through the park, we hear Abraham Lincoln's message to Congress a month before signing the Emancipation Proclamation: "We cannot escape history—the fiery trial through which we past will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation" (Cardiff), followed by an excerpt from Baudelaire's "Carrion" and Harry Thomas on his nighttime escape to Canada and out of slavery. "While Harry Thomas made his epic nighttime journey across America, Baudelaire walked the early morning streets of Paris. I like to imagine that at times their footsteps lined up, as if they walked together," Cardiff shares, again referencing walking as a spiritual, perhaps even political, exercise. But, if anything, this is dark magic, chaos magic—perhaps even magical realism—rendered all the more disturbing because of its refusal to draw clear connections between the loosely linked narratives of war, trauma, death, abuse, entrapment, and beauty and its destructive power. We are thus required to imagine ourselves into the trauma, into the minefield of a soundscape where everything triggers everything, and everything is tinged with darkness. Moreover, Cardiff's refusal to conjure a more direct possible source for the ominous sense of fear that undergirds the piece, or to construct a more linear narrative, forces us to contend with ourselves and the darkness of everyday life, where mundanity is as chaotic and treacherous as outright violence.

Incidentally, the repeated references to the themes of destructive and deceptive beauty, which is always paired in Cardiff's walk with the notion of captivity, conjure images of the infamous 'get thee to a nunnery' scene between Ophelia and Hamlet, when he callously scolds her and questions her virtue—"That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty" (3.1.117-118)--and later bitterly accuses her, and all women, of deception due to the very tendency of elusivity and resistance to singular identification that ironically characterizes much of Cixous' description of what it means to be a 'feminine writer': "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another" (3.1.154-156). His accusations and behavior in this scene, moreover, are widely cited as some of the causes of Ophelia's descent into madness.

The rest of the walk clips along more smoothly as we descend further into the chthonic realm/underworld of sorts, lined with shadowy reminders of trauma both personal and collective, that Cardiff has fashioned. She directs us down into the next tunnel, where we hear a mournful a cappella rendition of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." We listen with Cardiff, then hear what sounds like pillow talk with her lover, where they discuss Orpheus and Eurydice: "Of course he has to look back," she says, just as we do (and are). An opera singer in the background, singing sections from *Orfeo*, becomes louder as we descend deeper into captivity of sorts. As we, the participants, become more immersed in and entranced by the quiet power of Cardiff's hypnotizing voice,

and the underground depths of the park itself, snippets of music become both more prolonged and more disruptive. Dunn describes Ophelia's increasing reliance on musicality as a form of expression in a similar way: "Ophelia's songs dominate her mad scene, not only in their profusion, but in their disruptive and invasive power" (50). We look at the fourth photograph. Cardiff references the perpetual unnamed 'he,' presumably her lover, and we hear the only other notable exchange with an 'outsider' in the piece, this time with a 'stranger' who approaches Cardiff on the bench as she looks at the photograph:

MAN: Excuse me, who is that?

CARDIFF: I don't know, I just found this photograph at a flea market.

MAN: It looks just like my mother when she was young. She had long black hair just like that.

CARDIFF: It was taken right here. See? The exact same spot, you can see the tree and the lamppost.

MAN: Mmmhm. That's not her. She was here for a while though, it could have been her.

CARDIFF: You grew up in New York?

MAN: No, I'm just visiting. My mother left us and that's when she came here. Yeah. For a few years, I mean.

CARDIFF: How old were you?

MAN: Seven. She'd phone once in a while, but Dad wouldn't let us talk to her. He'd sit in the kitchen listening to the radio, drinking. I blamed him for her leaving. Now I realize how sad she was.

CARDIFF: But she came back?

MAN: Yeah, like it was Christmas. Presents and kisses. Sorry, what time is it? I have to go. My wife is supposed to be back at the hotel soon. Nice talking to you.

CARDIFF: Yeah, yeah, you too. Bye!

MAN: See ya.

Again, Cardiff reveals herself (and thus ourselves, as we both identify with her and function as 'others' during the walk) to lack credibility as a narrator; this exchange with a 'stranger' is far more unrealistic than any of the winding journeys we've taken across time and space so far. The explanation given for the source of the photo is unlikely at best, particularly given Cardiff's obsessive connection to it. Moreover, the protagonist's long, disheveled hair—a particularly Ophelian trait—is repeatedly referenced as a symbol of feminine sadness, abandonment, madness, or deviance.

Eventually, after continuing to put the various now-familiar 'voices' that guide our dark meditation in conversation with one another, she leads us down the stairs, to Bethesda Terrace; suddenly it's quiet, save for footsteps and a few birds. We see the famed Angel of the Waters at Bethesda Fountain, Angel of the Waters. Cardiff reorients us again, this time situating us firmly in Central Park and this particular urban space. She references the underground network

of tunnels populated primarily by homeless families and individuals: “Deep in the many layers, in some areas over ten stories deep, there’s a whole other city beneath us. It’s like in our minds. Deep layers that we only see in our dreams, that we don’t want to know about or remember,” she says, again suggesting that one of the purposes of the walk is not to banish memories, but to confront them in order to gently release them. Here, Cardiff draws clearly on the Freudian notion of the unconscious; the legacy of Ophelia itself, and of feminine madness, can be understood, particularly with an eye to the French feminist theoretical lens, as one of those ‘layers’ of unconscious trauma (from which Cardiff is drawing heavily) that connects women across time and space. Cardiff leads us past an ice cream stand to our next-to-final stop, the bridge, and conjures up another image of ill-fated love by referencing the cultural memory of John Lennon and Yoko Ono; we hear the singing of the gondolier on the lake beneath us. The willow tree and nearby flower garden too, are now visible, and the series of Ophelian symbols is all the more clear. Carroll Camden describes these signifiers in “On Ophelia’s Madness”:

According to Gertrude, to put it prosaically, Ophelia crowned herself with a garland of oddly assorted flowers and weeds, climbed a willow tree, and fell into a stream when the branch on which she sat broke. She floated for a while, continuing to sing ‘snatches of old tunes,’ then sank to ‘muddy death.’ Note that even at her watery end, the ‘envious sliver’ which let her fall is that of a willow, a tree linked in Shakespeare and elsewhere in Elizabethan literature with unrequited love. (Camden 252)

The journey, though quite brief, felt very long now. I was ready for answers as Cardiff directed me “past the two big rocks balancing on the big one” (Cardiff) and towards the lake, our final destination. “They’re here with us. Orpheus and Eurydice” (Cardiff). Indeed, the opera singer’s tones become richer and closer as we descend. “They try to leave here,” Cardiff continues, “but each time Eurydice dies, repeating their story over and over, and each time, Orpheus must make the long walk back, knowing what he has done, wanting to change the memory in his mind.” I began to consider the walk I would have to take back, now alone with my thoughts instead of *ours*. In the final photograph, the black-haired protagonist stands with her back to us, facing the lake and “thinking her thoughts” (Cardiff), memories that have now been made with us and alongside ours. As we overlook the lake and the site (whether literal or metaphorical) of the protagonist’s implied eventual drowning, Cardiff’s final monologue evokes both desperate loss and the finality of letting go, both of the mystery of the woman and of (t)he(i)r memories: “I want her to turn around, but she never will. She’s frozen by the camera, forever facing the lake. My words are here now, just as she was here. They’ll disappear even though I try to keep them, record them, play them over and over in my attempts to hang onto time. I want you to do one last experiment. Match your breathing to mine” (Cardiff). We breathed together, the three of us. She fades. She is gone. The silence—and

the loss—were palpable, and a relief. I, like Cardiff, and like Orpheus, try not to look back. But I knew, eventually, I would. The return route was frighteningly silent.

Like Showalter's and Dunn's Ophelia(s), Cardiff's Ophelia is frozen, this time by the camera as well as our own limitations in comprehending her. In expressing her desire for her to 'turn around,' she expresses her wish that Ophelia herself become unfrozen: from Hamlet's narrative, from her status as symbol, and from our cultural memory. However, Cardiff's Ophelia, in choosing to be neither legible nor fully visible, also performs an act of refusal in the vein of Dunn's suggestion of her refusal of social order through disruptive vocal expression. If, as Dunn suggests, Ophelia can be understood only as temporarily disruptive through her vocality, and not as possessing the potential for true escape, then the lake is the only possible final destination; however, notably, the participants themselves are able to consider the possibility and refuse it, in order to retrace their steps. And if, as Showalter suggests, Ophelia is unable to be understood outside the historical burden of her patriarchal cultural representation, perhaps unknowability is her only recourse. Cixous writes, "It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be coned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem" (Cixous 881). Cardiff's notions of feminine madness, as represented in her own art, are inextricable from the Ophelian archetype; however, as Cixous urges, in "Her Long Black Hair," she actively refuses both silence and the symbolic, which offers, if not an escape through direct empowerment, at least an admission of unknowability and, thus, a measure of freedom for Ophelia.

Cardiff's aesthetic, and its potential political implications, is best summarized by her description of her younger self at one point during "Her Long Black Hair": "I was thinking again about my first trip here so many years ago as an art student. I found everything beautiful then" (Cardiff). She lists several of what she calls "spontaneous moments of magic": "a man dressed in a clown suit carrying a briefcase," "the cashier in the grocery store telling me about the death of her cat," and "the sudden dancing of two women on the street," for example. Thus, for Cardiff, non-normative approaches to thinking, being, and doing are not deviant, but magical, laden with possibility and potential meaning. Here, internal chaos is put to good use. The rush of mania is alternately stilled (offering moments of respite) and reflected in

Cardiff's own urgency, even encouraged; the hallmark numbness of depression is coaxed into painful recognition through strategic pressure applied to emotional trigger-points, then finally released in a manner that carries all the more weight because it feels like surrender and relief rather than euphoria. The many moments of self-induced dissociation—from self, from body, from mind,

from others, from the outside environment, from the past, and from the present—in “Her Long Black Hair” reflect the alienation-from-self that is frequently an aspect, not only of mental illness itself, but of the traumatizing treatments and pathologization often associated with ‘belonging’ to that category.

Cardiff’s work, moreover, reflects Munoz’s understanding of fiction in the context of identity formation; that is, “an understanding of fiction as a ‘technology of the self.’ This self is a disidentificatory self whose relation to the social is not overdetermined by universalizing rhetorics of selfhood. The ‘real self’ who comes into being through fiction is not the self who produces fiction, but is instead produced by fiction. Binaries finally begin to falter and fiction becomes the real” (Munoz 11). In this vein, for me, the walk was *re*orienting rather than *dis*orienting; more precisely, for a mind like mine (at least at the time), what might have been experienced by a neurotypical individual as disturbing, chaotic, alienating, or devoid of meaning was far more comprehensible, palatable, and relatable than a guided tour or meditation that resists flights of fancy or even hallucination and hauntings. Indeed, Cardiff does the opposite, locating the potential pleasure in walking the line between madness and creativity. My own reading of the walk—both then and now—as pertaining to my personal identity formation as a member of a marginalized population and a particular imagined community speaks to the potential political power of disidentification as a strategic move, particularly within art and art-making.

Finally, moving towards the political potential of further research in this vein, Cardiff speaks to the ways in which what Alison Kafer refers to as “compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness” (17) in *Feminist Queer Crip* are reinforced by many contemporary artistic aesthetics; here, of course, I focus primarily on able-mindedness, which Kafer includes alongside able-bodiedness in order to point to the inextricability of body from mind (which is heavily reinforced by the ways in which Cardiff encourages us to move, explore space, and reflect on said ways of moving and exploring, not after the fact but in real time), but also in order to encourage us to “think disability differently” (Kafer 16) and particularly more inclusively. In creating this way—I refer here to Cardiff’s commitment to nonlinearity and her privileging of organized chaos and the divorcing of signifiers from their expected meanings, creating a ‘third space’ that we fill with our own—Cardiff creates a site of potential identification for neurologically atypical individuals, who think and move alongside her in a rare moment of shared consciousness and community-building. As is common for those who identify as ‘mad,’ mentally ill, or neurologically atypical, those who participate in Cardiff’s walks, particularly in public permanent or semipermanent spaces like Central Park, also participate in an imagined community. This marginalized community—users and former users of mental health services, that is—is undertheorized in comparison to others that have articulated a more sophisticated politic of solidarity. Like a national community, you must imagine

yourself into it; like the identity markers of queerness and disability, it is often misread, misinterpreted, or outright invisible, and is assumed to be deviant; but unlike queerness, for example, it is rarely discovered in confrontation with another body (through the recognition of desire, sameness or similarity, or a sexual encounter) and resists the creation of community itself. This is not only due to its marginalized status but to the experience of a unique form of isolation, in which the 'mad' individual is isolated not only from neurotypical society as a whole, but from the 'disordered' part of his/her brain. The neurologically atypical individual is encouraged to think of him or herself as separate from the 'deviant' part of the mind (and thus the self) which is 'disordered,' 'deviant,' or 'problematic,' which prevents body/mind unification and often exacerbates the experience of internally replayed and repeated trauma. This adheres to Kafer's notion of the harmful effects of treating disability as a "pre-determined limit" (19), which, she argues, refuses disabled individuals the possibility of imagining a future, or the building of solidarity within a community, that is not wholly dependent on and constitutive of either a 'cure' and its requisite magical revolutionary properties or the perpetual search for it. Whether Cardiff belongs to said 'community' organized around that particular category of difference or not is irrelevant; in "Her Long Black Hair" and her other audio walks, she constructs a site of imagination, where able-mindedness is far from compulsory (and, in fact, 'thinking mad' is compulsory if you follow her imperatives), and neurologically atypical individuals can imagine themselves into a community (at least of two) where non-normative and even 'deviant' ways of thinking are privileged, woven into the aesthetic, and made beautiful. Cardiff's work provides insight into the political potential of disidentification, not only for the artist herself, but for the audience/spectator/reader/co-participant, as a possibility as we move towards more effective and sophisticated coalition-building and a more radical attitude towards eschewing ableism and false binaries as they apply to the future of how mental health-related issues and identities are treated, framed, and analyzed, as well as how the dominant understandings of 'mental illness' can be challenged and resisted.

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