Despite the claim of a number of authors that madness, as an experience, escapes language and signifi-
cation, the number of patient narratives, or pathographies of madness, is growing almost exponentially. 
Through their alliance with different discourses, these pathographies take different stances in relation 
to psychiatric discourses and practices that regulate the patients’ experiences.

This presentation addresses the discursive spaces available to the patient subjects of psychiatry to 
express and interpret symptoms that qualify for madness in different cultural and historical contexts. 
It traces the trajectories of patient narratives by placing them in the context of speech practices within 
psychiatry.

Psychiatry itself, through its power and practice of incarceration, is a spatial practice where speech 
acts have direct impact on their subject’s positioning in space. As a cultural practice, it has been 
critically examined in the emerging field of socio-cultural history of madness. The new history of 
madness examines both the ways and conditions within which patients’ voices can emerge, but also 
the ways in which madness itself can be manifested in different times and places. In relation to 
madness, language shapes both the experience itself and its interpretation in ways that are dependant 
on the historical and cultural context as well as the gendered, classed, ethnic, sexual and religious 
background of the subject.

The presentation compares and contrasts patient narratives from different times and in different places, 
and poses questions in regard to the choise and availability of narrative and discursive frames both 
to the narrators themselves and those who interpret them. These choises are rearded as both political 
and ethical, and, as landscapes of representation, have direct impact on the experiences of those who 
cross the border from the world of the sane to that of madness.

Keywords: patient narratives, psychiatry, madness.