

Madness Manifest: Creativity, Art and the Margins of Mental Health

Pond Inlet, Brock University, January 14, 2008 (rev. 19.12.07)

SPEAKERS and ABSTRACTS (in alphabetical order)

rev. 19.12.07

Presenter: Dr. Gregory Betts (Brock University)

Paper Title: “Just Playing Mad: Canadian Surrealist Drama”

Abstract:

While the term “avant-garde” has come to be little more than a synonym for “new” or “innovative,” critics are increasingly returning to its militaristic origins to argue that avant-gardism represents a unique embrace of visionary irrationalism. André Breton argued for his Surrealist movement that embracing and externalizing the irrational sub-conscious would enable society to escape modernism’s nihilistic malaise, and re-energize creative power and progress. From this and other hubristic speculations, the critic Matei Calinescu deduces the avant-garde as “a radicalized and strongly utopianized version of modernity.” John Weightman adds that “avant-garde is not simply a military metaphor” but an attempt to predict and “understand human life as a dynamic process in time [...] by anticipating the crest of the next wave.” Utopias fail, but the revolutionary avant-garde’s battle over futurity presents an extreme and unique aesthetic that constantly demands rupture with received ideas, ideologies, and cultural habits. Avant-garde aesthetics constantly and consciously position themselves on the edge of what society deems madness in order to discover new patterns of creative order/disorder.

Canadian writing of the past 100 years has not been acclaimed for its audacity, originality, or radical inclination. My study will, however, address the dramatic work of one substantial node of Canadian response to European modernism – the French-Canadian Automatist movement. The Automatists shared the European Surrealist strong spirit of unbridled, irrational psychological utopianism. In fact, recognizing their contributions, Breton once described the Canadians as the “first-rate” successors of his own Surrealism (Rousselot 1953). With reference to recent theorizations of the avant-garde by Calinescu, Weightman, and Russell, and to more foundational approaches to madness by Foucault and Freud, my paper will consider how Automatist theatre manifests the avant-garde utopian, and delightfully irrational, aesthetic as a form of performative madness.

Bio:

Gregory Betts is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language & Literature, where he teaches Canadian and Avant-Garde literature. He has published two books of experimental poetry, and has edited two editions of modern Canadian poetry: *After Exile: a Raymond Knister Poetry Reader*; and *In the Ward: the Urban Poetry and Paintings of Lawren Harris*. He is currently working on a scholarly edition of the avant-garde manifestos, essays, and stories of Bertram Brooker for the University of Ottawa Press.

Roundtable Participant: David Fancy (Brock University)

(See bottom of document for an abstract of the roundtable discussion)

Bio:

David Fancy teaches in the dramatic literature and theatre streams in the Department of Dramatic Arts at Brock University. He holds a PhD in theatre studies from the Samuel - Beckett Centre at Trinity College in Dublin in the areas of postcolonial and critical theory. He has published articles on the subject of French theatre, postcoloniality, and theatre for social change in scholarly journals in France, the US, Britain and Canada.

David's translations of the plays of Bernard-Marie Koltès recently appeared with Methuen Drama. He is currently a Chancellor's Chair for Excellence in Teaching, a position which he will share with Sue Spearey from the department of English until 2008. Together they are collaborating on exploring the confluence of mindfulness meditation practices, contemporary critical theory and various movement practices in their teaching.

David has also worked extensively as a professional singer and actor in Ireland and France. His training method involves a fusion of approaches from the work of Jerzy Grotowski, Rudolph Laban and others. He is directing the Department of Dramatic Art's second mainstage production of the year, Carol Churchill's *The Skriker* February 14, 15, 16 in the Sean O' Sullivan Theatre.

Presenter: Jon Eben Field (Brock University)

Paper Title: "Delusions of Grandeur and Persecution: Meditations on Autobiography, Mental Illness and Philosophy"

Abstract:

Jacques Lacan, in the seminars of 1955-6 on psychosis, writes a telling passage about the difference between 'normal' and psychotic experience: "As if we don't, all of us, all of the time, have visions, as if we are never in the grip of phrases that just pop into our heads, sometimes brilliant, illuminating phrases that orientate us. Obviously, we don't put them to the same use as the psychotic does" (110). In this paper, I will meditate on the meaning of use, and, in many ways, on the uses of use. I will venture into the realms of autobiography, mental illness, and philosophy to draw out the connection between Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussions of solipsism and Daniel Paul Schreber's autobiographical text, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*. Through examining the connection between the particular solipsism of Schreber's delusions and Wittgenstein's penetrating analysis of the limit of the logic of solipsism, the paper will point to possible convergences between madness and philosophy. In other words, the experience of insanity is a relational node that is central to the problems of philosophy insofar as madness embodies, par excellence, the beyond of the limit of rational discursive constructions. For Schreber, madness is written as a limit experience which, for better or worse, requires sanity in order to exist. Madness is the dark and fecund unutterable space that is both what philosophy aims to illuminate and that continually eludes elucidation. Imagine realizing, then, "You can't go looking for the darkness if you have a light."

Bio:

Jon Eben Field is currently employed by the Student Development Centre at Brock University as a Learning Skills Instructor. He recently completed his M.Ed. at the University of British Columbia where his research focused on the surfacing of biomedical discourse in autobiographical accounts of mental illness. Previously, he completed a M.A. at the University of Toronto in English and a B.A. in English and Contemporary Studies from the University of King's College (Halifax).

Presenter: Brittany Gnau (Brock University)

Paper Title: "Playing with Limits: Madness, Drama, and the Pleasure of Transgression"

Abstract:

In this paper I intend to explore the relationship between ordering structures of control which allow the world to be understandable, and the irreconcilable forces of anarchy that surge up to challenge our articulated lives and values. The resulting instability, disorder, and madness can encourage revelation, ecstasy, and creativity. These effects are exhibited and wildly pursued by Georges Bataille, following the influences of two previous madmen, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Marquis de Sade. To challenge bureaucratic structures of containment and power, Bataille follows the Marquis de Sade in exhibiting how transgression and deviance disrupt the mechanisms that regulate society. Self-preservation and health are often privileged over self-

abolishment and illness. Inverting the proposed hierarchy, they proceed along a course of highly structured and ordered offense, blurring the lines between pleasure and pain, life and death.

Using Bataille's fictional narratives and Marat/Sade, I will argue that part of human existence entails a desire to no longer continue to exist, to be extinguished. This fundamental paradox lies at the root of both anguish and psychosis, but also rapturous mysticism as individual beings attempt to communicate and live beyond their own boundaries. Conversely, using Albert Camus' play Caligula, I will argue that this unbridled use of power and desire leads to tyranny and that a cycle of lavish libidinal energy cannot be sustained for long. Can this critique allow for a deeper understanding of the relation between insanity and order? Or would this suggestion be dismissed as evidence of a feeble disposition that cannot handle the ravishes of lunacy?

Bio:

Brittany Gnau got her BA at the University of Central Arkansas in Philosophy and History. She went on to Brock University where she studied and earned her MA in Contemporary Continental Philosophy and Eastern/Comparative Studies. She is currently pursuing another MA in Comparative Literature from the same school.

Presenter: Andy Houston (University of Waterloo)

Session Title: "From Symptom to 'Sinthome': Darren O'Donnell's Social Acupuncture as 'Talking Cure'"

Abstract:

But, regret it or not, the subject must take full responsibility. No one else can say no for him or her; if the subject is cornered with improper questions, there's no need to get wound up – he or she just has to say no. This is a very personal point for me, suffering as I do from a compulsion to ask things I'm not supposed to ask – something Tourette's-like in its visceral insistence. Keeping my mouth shut leads first to an accumulation of manic energy and the desire to wildly misbehave, followed by fatigue, ennui and depression. I believe in the inherent right to ask prying and inappropriate questions, as long as the right of refusal accompanies it.

Darren O'Donnell

I want to examine the "Tourette's-like in its visceral insistence" dimension of Darren O'Donnell's Social Acupuncture. Through an exploration of Q. and A., What Kind of a Person is This?, Diplomatic Immunities, and other Social Acupuncture practices, O'Donnell can be seen to cultivate an aesthetic engagement in the process of asking questions of strangers, and through this process he has created an art practice which allows him, and perhaps other willing participants, to realise what Jacques Lacan described as the end of therapy; that is, an identification with the symptom, or the point where the subject is able to recognize, in the Real of his or her desire, the only support of his or her being. In this case, the Real is the occasionally uncomfortable or uncanny experience of engaging strangers in what can often become an intimate conversation. The relational aesthetics of Social Acupuncture can be seen as a process of transforming O'Donnell's symptom to ask risky questions into a sinthome; in that, as O'Donnell suggests, it is a way to avoid avoid madness, the way we choose something (the symptom-formation of the question) instead of nothing (ennui, depression, and the destruction of the symbolic universe).

Bio:

Andy is the Views & Reviews Editor of the Canadian Theatre Review. In 2002, he and scenographer Kathleen Irwin started Knowhere Productions, a performance company which had its debut with a multi-disciplinary, site-specific performance in a disused wing of the Saskatchewan Mental Hospital at Weyburn, entitled The Weyburn Project. Their next large-scale site-specific work entitled Crossfiring recently took place at the Claybank historical brick plant in southwestern Saskatchewan in August and September 2006 (see www.crossfiring2006.ca). His

current research seeks to examine the interface between digital and live events in various environments, in particular how new forms of staging identity and place through virtual reality technologies meet with the same in live interaction. He is a participating artist-researcher in the transcontinental, multidisciplinary project entitled *Common Plants: Cross Pollinations in Hybrid Reality* (www.yorku.ca/gardens), and has recently been awarded funding from S.S.H.R.C., the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, and the Ontario Innovation Trust to pursue this research.

Presenter: Clarissa Hurley (University of Toronto)

Paper Title: "Fake Madwomen: The pazzia Scene in Scala's Scenarios"

Abstract:

Flaminio Scala's collection of commedia dell'arte play outlines, *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, was published in 1611, the year after the appearance of Jacques Ferrand's first treatise on erotic melancholy, *A Treatise on Lovesickness*. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there was a conjunction of the interest in erotomania as a "real" medical condition and the representation of that condition on the popular stage. In his long career Scala witnessed the emergence of the professional actress in Italian theatre. One of these, Isabella Andreini, became renowned for her virtuosity in the pazzia, or mad scene. Scala's collection contains several instances of fully scripted mad scenes, both in comic and tragic genres, performed both as "natural" and feigned disorders. Carol Thomas Neely (*Distracted Subjects*) argues that the staging of madness in the early modern period offered audiences a means of identifying and responding to it. This paper explores some instances of pazzia scenes in Scala's scenarios and contemporary accounts of their performance with a view to better understanding the role of the professional theatre (and professional actress) in shaping and reflecting cultural attitudes towards gender-based erotic "distraction".

Bio:

Clarissa Hurley (MA, University of New Brunswick) is completing a PhD at the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. Her thesis explores the grotesque in the Baroque period of the commedia dell'arte. She also has a background in professional acting.

Keynote Presenter: Kirsty Johnston (University of British Columbia)

Paper Title: "Learning from Experience: New Strategies for Representing Mental Illness on Canadian Stages"

Abstract:

Since the 1990s, several Canadian theatre artists and companies have been re-imagining mental illness representation in theatre. Challenging traditional, commonplace and often stigmatizing representational patterns, they have pioneered with innovative dramaturgical processes, theatre forms and networks. Perhaps the most prominent and innovative company connected to these efforts is Toronto's Workman Arts. Since its founding in 1988 and incorporation in 1991, the company has produced over 38 original Canadian plays and has toured locally, nationally and abroad. In this paper I will argue that although these individual productions are innovative in distinct ways, they are also linked by the company's pioneering dramaturgical process and overarching representational pattern. Exploring several critical productions from the company's history, I hope to demonstrate how the company has helped to challenge and re-imagine mental illness in Canada and abroad.

Bio:

Kirsty Johnston is an Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia Department of Theatre and Film. Her doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto explored the activities of the Workman Theatre Project and she has published on their work and other innovative stage representations of mental illness in Canada. Her current research project is entitled

"Perform/ability: Disability Theatre in Canada" and is supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Standard Research Grant.

Presenter: Rajiv Kaushik (Brock University)

Paper Title: "On Stendhal Syndrome: an alternative phenomenological analysis?"

Abstract:

This paper offers a reconsideration of Graziella Magherini's diagnoses of Stendhal Syndrome, named after the author who once suffered from a kind of disorientation before artworks on a trip to Florence in 1811. While Magherini's case studies and her Freudian interpretations of Stendhal Syndrome are examined here, the paper argues that Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological analyses of the painting can offer another hypothesis. Although this paper does not go so far as to claim that Magherini's patients certainly do not suffer from a psychological disorder, it does claim that, taken to its proper conclusions, the invisibility of the canvas as Marion defines it would induce something that looks to us like Stendhal Syndrome. Following Marion, this paper argues that there are also occasions in which these radical sorts of experiences are more in accord with the work, which functions by opening us up in a new way and thus displacing or disorienting us. Here the canvas is fulfilling its originary function, operating as an 'icon,' which for Marion indicates and directs us into a radical alterity. In this case, the term 'syndrome' is no longer appropriate to explain what happens when the viewer is confronted with the canvas that Marion describes. But perhaps we have also lost the capacity to understand the painting as an icon in Marion's sense, and therefore reduce any severe reactions to the painting to a syndrome?

Bio:

Rajiv Kaushik was hired to the Brock Philosophy department in 2006, after having completed his doctoral thesis at the University of Essex and L'université de Louvain. His research interests are mainly in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Specifically, he is interested in the various experiences of loss (longing, nostalgia, mourning, tragedy, etc.) and the temporality of consciousness. His current project is entitled: "Striking, Memory, Longing: a brief phenomenology of the poem."

Presenter: Athena Madan (Brock University)

Workshop Title: "gemædde: A review of symbolic and corporal expression associated with psychosis"

Workshop Description:

This interactive, process-oriented workshop will examine symbolic and corporal expressions associated with the lived experience of psychosis. We may also address historical and present-day perceptions of madness, the (Western) constructs that shape our understanding of psychosis, and with each of these, some accompanying limitations. Enquiring Jungian, scholarly, practitioner, and thespian minds (and bodies) all welcome.

Bio:

Athena Madan (M.A.; C.C.C) is an arts therapist and a part-time lecturer with the Faculty of Social Sciences at Brock University.

Presenter: Elizabeth Marquis (University of Toronto)

Paper Title: "The Multiple Personalities of Filmic Madness: Silence of the Lambs as Progressive/Regressive Text"

Abstract:

To date, much of the writing about mental illness in film has focused on the often egregiously inaccurate manner in which popular movies have represented a variety of psychological conditions. While this sort of criticism undoubtedly serves an important purpose, it is not without

its faults. Most obviously, it can lead to some fairly stagnant analyses, set simply on distinguishing the "good" representations of pathology from the "bad" ones. At the same time, some versions of this comparative approach also downplay the actual complexity and heterogeneity of mental illness by implying that there is a singular, "true" version of each known psychological disorder that cultural texts might imitate. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, an extreme focus on the relative (in)accuracy of 'movie madness' also overlooks the numerous significant functions that representations of mental illness fulfill in popular media texts.

With these issues in mind, I wish to consider the representation(s) of insanity in Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Rather than focusing on the relative "truthfulness" of the film's versions of mental illness, I'll demonstrate how its pathological characters perform a great deal of ideological work that is worthy of scrutiny. For instance, on one hand, the film blurs the boundaries between sanity and insanity in order to articulate a critique of the self-obsessed, cannibalistic nature of contemporary society as a whole. At the same time, however, this progressive tendency only partially obscures a simultaneous use of mental illness to police the boundaries of social "normalcy". In particular, what the film positions as especially "crazy" is the desire to transcend the limitations of biology; it casts individuals who question their anatomical "nature" as psychotic monsters and thus stands in reactionary counterpoint to postmodern claims about the performativity of identity. By pointing out and considering these kinds of politically significant functions, I hope to underline the importance of thinking about popular representations of mental illness in terms of their social efficacy as well as their potential accuracy.

Bio:

Elizabeth Marquis received a B.A. in Drama & Psychology from McMaster University and an M.A. in Cinema Studies from New York University. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto, where she is completing a thesis on performance in documentary film.

Presenter: Carol Merriam (Brock University)

Paper Title: "Disheveled and Dangerous: Mad Women and Social Convention in Classical Poetry"

Abstract:

In their descriptions of madness, ancient authors established very different standards and norms for men and women, often through using different techniques to convey madness in the different sexes. When poets wanted to convey the impression of a man struggling with insanity, they described his emotions and physical sensations, as if he were suffering with an illness. No blame is attached, and such affliction is commonly found even in subjective poetry, where male poets described their own sufferings.

We see a marked difference in the depiction of women who are being presented as insane. For these characters, their actions are described to prove that they are mad, and their actions are reprehensible because they involve active rejection of the norms of behaviour expected of them. Women who have lost their reason commonly lose all interest in their appearance, actively tearing their hair and clothing. They also eschew human companionship, and leave their homes and cities, abandoning their proper roles. The dangers inherent in their madness and disobedience are clear in the narrative contexts, as these women end up actively betraying their fathers, husbands and homelands, handing them over to destruction because of this madness, exemplified in their rejection of normal female behaviour.

Bio:

Carol Merriam is an Associate Professor in the Department of Classics of Brock University. She holds a Ph.D. in Classics from The Ohio State University, and did her undergraduate and M.A. work at Queen's University at Kingston. Her area of specialization is Latin poetry of the first

century B.C., particularly the Latin love elegy. She is the author of 2 books and numerous articles on Latin poetry, and has made numerous conference presentations on Latin literature and Roman civilization.

Presenter: Kerri Michalica (Brock University)

Paper Title: "Creativity and Schizophrenia Unveiled: The Similarities and the Differences"

Abstract:

This study will examine the relation between creativity and mental illness by measuring the cognitive styles and personalities of visual artists, schizophrenics, and comparison participants. Barron (1969) found that creative individuals shared many personality traits as those with mental illness. Ludwig (1998) found that people in more creative professions have a higher prevalence of mental illness than those in less creative professions. Creativity and schizotypy will be measured in this study to examine these relations. Overinclusiveness, the failure to inhibit details that are irrelevant to the current situation, has been associated with both schizophrenia (Baruch, Hemsley, & Gray, 1988) and creativity (Carson, Higgins, & Peterson, 2003), and will also be measured. Many believe that intrapsychic conflict is needed in order to create art (Barron, 1969; Neihart, 1998). Other than schizotypy, childhood maltreatment will be assessed to examine its role in creativity or schizophrenia. Both high creatives and schizophrenics are expected to become more deeply absorbed into experience, but creatives may be higher on aspects of absorption reflected in mystical states, while schizophrenics may score higher on its dissociating aspects. Many believe that creative people are more intelligent than those with mental illness; however, not all research supports this. One possibility is that spatial ability is lower in those with mental illness. Sass and Parnas (2003) proposed that schizophrenia is a disorder of the self, which may be related to spatial ability. Another related concept is that of balance, which could be thought of in terms of the sense of self within ones environment. Spatial abilities, sense of presence, and balance will also be examined.

Bio:

Kerri Michalica has been a graduate student at Brock University since 2002. She completed her Master's degree in psychology and is now working on her PhD. Under the supervision of Dr. Hunt, she is conducting a project with visual artists, people diagnosed with schizophrenia, and students in order to detect the personality and cognitive similarities and differences between the groups. Kerri also works as a visual artist and has had several shows in the Niagara Region.

Guest Artist: Darren O' Donnell

Bio:

Darren O'Donnell is a writer, director, social acupuncturist, designer and artistic director of Mammalian Diving Reflex. His shows include A Suicide-Site Guide to the City, Diplomatic Immunities, ppeeeaaacceeee, [boxhead], White Mice, Over, Who Shot Jacques Lacan?, Radio Rooster Says That's Bad and Mercy! He has written for C Magazine, Public, Canadian Theatre Review, Daily News and Analysis India and Descant.

His most recent book, *Social Acupuncture*, argues for an aesthetic of civic engagement, an approach to cultural production that acknowledges the severe shortcomings of neoliberalism and the failure of the private sector to take care of the public interest, viewing this as an opportunity for artists to step into the world of social policy. Responding to all the hot air about creativity and the creative city, O'Donnell states "there is the need for an understanding of art that goes not only beyond pleasant aesthetics, but beyond even typical ideas of creativity and imagination, direct engaging with the civic sphere; an aesthetic that can work directly with the institutions of civil society - an aesthetic of civic engagement. An aesthetic that says: Okay, so you want to make culture and creativity a central part of civic life? Fine. Then, as an artist, I want in on the

institutions that form - at ground level - the fabric of the city. I want to use these as material in my art practice."

Darren was the 2000 winner of the Pauline McGibbon Award for directing and has been nominated for a number of Dora Awards for his writing, directing, and acting, winning (with Naomi Campbell) for their design of *White Mice*. His play [boxhead] was nominated for a Chalmers Award and he received a Gabriel Award for excellence in broadcasting for his CBC radio piece *Like a Fox*.

Coach House Books has published four of his books: *Inoculations (White Mice, Over, Who Shot Jacques Lacan?, Radio Rooster Says That's Bad)*; *pppeeeaaacceeee* (the play plus essays by the collaborators); his first novel, *Your Secrets Sleep with Me*, which has been called by *The Chicago Reader* "a bible for the dispossessed, a prophecy so full of hope it's crushing"; and most recently *Social Acupuncture: A guide to suicide, performance and utopia* which include the text for *A Suicide-Site Guide to the City* and an extended essay about social acupuncture.

Presenter: Catherine Parayre (Brock University)

Paper Title: "'Madness' and desire: Jane Eyre and Wittgenstein's Nephew"

Abstract:

In his influential *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, René Girard posits that the plots of a significant number of Western novels are based on triangular relationships, in which the protagonist "pursues objects which... seem to be determined for him" by a "model" character or "mediator." In this paper, I will examine two novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and *Wittgenstein's Nephew* (1982) by the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard, in which the triangular relationship is shaped by disability, both cognitive and physical. Indeed, these two novels involve a physically disabled protagonist whose object of admiration is respectively a young woman and a famous philosopher. The mediator, however, is hardly a model to emulate as this character, whether it is the protagonist's estranged wife in *Jane Eyre* or the unsuccessful friend in *Wittgenstein's Nephew*, suffers from "madness." Yet, it is precisely her/his presence that sparks the main character to pursue the object of his desire. In fact, together with the evocation of physical disability, "madness" dramatizes the structure of the triangular relationship by throwing a particularly favorable light on the non-disabled object of desire. Simultaneously, just as Girard claims that the subject "imitates" the mediator, the physically disabled protagonist perceives himself as being "mad." Exploring the function of mental illness in the two novels, the paper will argue that desire, once defined by "madness", is not so much the expression of personal attraction or love, but an aspiration to effective – able – social performance as well as a quest for order.

Bio:

Catherine Parayre is assistant professor in Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures. Her research interests are literature and the visual arts, disability studies, and minority literature (Occitan). Among her publications are several articles and four books.

Roundtable Participant: Virginia Reh (Brock University)

(See bottom of document for an abstract of the roundtable discussion)

Bio:

Virginia Reh joined the Dramatic Arts faculty in 2006, having been part-time faculty for the previous 13 years. She has also taught at the Banff Festival, Equity Showcase, Sheridan College, Keyano College, the University of Toronto Opera School and Theatre Ontario Summer Courses. Virginia has a long and varied career as actor, director and coach, working in theatre, opera and film and television. Virginia was founding Co-Director of Script Lab, developing many plays, musicals and film scripts. She was Artistic Director of the Gryphon Theatre. For many years Virginia was acting coach and production manager to the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus and

has worked with many other youth groups and coached young performers for stage and film. In 1994, Virginia received the Theatre Ontario's Maggie Bassett award for outstanding contribution to Theatre in Ontario. She is an Ontario Councillor for Canadian Actors' Equity. Virginia Reh directed the department's mainstage productions of *Ring Round the Moon* in fall 2006 and *Marat/Sade* in November of 2007.

Presenter: Alysse Rich (University of Toronto)
Paper Title: "The Height of Madness"

Abstract:

In the summer of 2007, I adapted Euripides' *Bacchae* into a show entitled *The Height of Madness*. Euripides' play is largely centred around the idea of Dionysian "madness"; there are those characters who accept the god willingly and are blessed with certain "freedoms", and there are those for whom the "freedoms" are punishment for their attempts to escape the god's powers. The type of "madness" portrayed in the play is related to religious ecstasy, yet this is often also political and associated with power. For instance, Dionysian "madness" often occurs by means of the subversion of gender roles: the women are free to commune with nature, but the freedom and violent activities they experience are traditionally masculine. The initiation of the main male character, Pentheus, into his form of madness is also related to gender and power, as his power is undermined during a fascinating cross-dressing scene. Through these different religious and gendered experiences of the characters in his play, Euripides asks the important question: Who really is mad, and how necessary or justified is their madness? My paper explores the experimental rehearsal process and ultimate performance of *The Height of Madness* as they relate to the very different Bacchic experiences of Pentheus, the foreign chorus, and the Theban women. I will utilize theories of the body in space (such as phenomenology and discursivity) as well as modern interpretations of Dionysian madness such as those posited by Nietzsche, in order to discuss the results of rehearsal experimentation upon the performance of different experiences of "madness".

Bio:

Alysse Rich is a PhD student at the University of Toronto's Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. She received her Honours BA in English – Drama and Theatre from McGill University. Alysse is interested in the reception of Greek tragedy in the twentieth century, and using performance as a means of investigating text.

Guest Artist: Richard Rose

Bio:

For over 25 years, Mr. Rose has been a distinguished director in the Canadian theatre community, as well as having directed internationally. Currently, he is Artistic Director of the Tarragon Theatre (since 2002) and was the Founding Artistic Director of the highly regarded Necessary Angel Theatre Company (1978 – 2002). He is an Adjunct Professor at York University and sits on the Advisory Council of the George Brown College Theatre Program. Mr. Rose has served as Director of the Young Company, Stratford Festival (1994 to 1996) and as an Associate Director of the Canadian Stage Company (1996 to 1997). He has directed in theatres across the country from major regional theatres like the Manitoba Theatre Centre to smaller theatres like GCTC, Ottawa and he has directed internationally from commercial productions in the West End, New York and Los Angeles to training institutions like the Shepherd School of Music in Houston. Awards received: numerous Dora Mavor Moore Awards, the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards, LA Dramalogue, the People's Choice at the Bitef Festival, Belgrade and a Betty Mitchell Award, Calgary. Mr. Rose was honoured with a Doctorate of Sacred Letters (*jure dignitatus*) from Thornloe University, Sudbury.

Roundtable Participant: Stan Sadava (Brock University)
(See bottom of document for an abstract of the roundtable discussion)

Bio: The research of Stan Sadava, Professor of Psychology at Brock University, focuses on the social psychology of health. In particular, he is interested in relationship intimacy, attachment orientations and health. He investigates health related behaviours, determinants and outcomes and vulnerability to alcohol problems. Social psychology topics include: relationship problems, loneliness, attachment; Canadian context of social psychology; and positive psychology, particularly in health and wellbeing. Professor Sadava served as an advisor during the rehearsal process for the Department of Dramatic Art's first production of the 2007-2008 mainstage season, Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade*.

Presenter: Linda Steer (Brock University)

Paper Title: "From Pathology to Ecstasy: Picturing Hysteria in *La Révolution surréaliste*"

Abstract:

In 1929, in a manifesto-like article, surrealist leaders André Breton and Louis Aragon published a series of Paul Régnard's scientific photographs to honour "the fiftieth anniversary of hysteria" in *La Révolution surréaliste*, a surrealist periodical. Breton and Aragon claimed that hysteria was "the greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century."

Régnard's photographs were originally taken at Charcot's clinic at the Salpêtrière hospital where they functioned as representations of psychiatric categories of illness. Charcot and other nineteenth-century scientists valued photography for its supposed objective status: photographs were seen as the perfect scientific documents. The photographs, however, were hardly objective. The photographs of hysterics operated in and through a nineteenth-century discourse on science and madness and worked to construct a notion of hysteria that was inextricably linked to presuppositions about gender otherness, health, and the perfect body. For the surrealists, however, the photographs represented ecstasy. They regarded hysteria as a manifestation of surreality, the convergence of the two worlds of dream and reality, the unconscious and the conscious.

This paper examines the surrealist fascination with images of hysteria, and the process by which the appropriation of Paul Régnard's scientific photographs of a young hysteric positioned hysteria as poetry rather than disease in the surrealist publication.

Bio:

Linda Steer is Assistant Professor in the Department of Visual Arts and in the Great Books/Liberal Studies Program at Brock University. In general, Dr. Steer's research addresses the ways in which meaning is constructed in art and visual culture, particularly through the circulation of images. She recently defended her dissertation, "Found, Borrowed and Stolen: The Use Of Photographs in French Surrealist Reviews, 1924-1939," at Binghamton University, where she worked with Professor John Tagg. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this work focused on the transformation of photographic meaning when nineteenth-century found photographs were published in surrealist periodicals in the early twentieth century. In another project, she is investigating the use of avant-garde visual strategies drawn from Dada and Surrealism by a 1960s French revolutionary architecture group, *Utopie*, in their journal of the same name. Additionally, she is on the steering committee of a multidisciplinary, multi-university research group on the history and theory of photography. She also writes about contemporary art.

Presenter: Ernesto Virgulti (Brock University)

Paper Title: "Madness and Truth in Luigi Pirandello's Right You Are (If You Think So)"

Abstract:

This paper explores Luigi Pirandello's treatment of madness and truth in his 1917 play, *Così è (se vi pare)* [Right You Are (If You Think So)]. The play begins in the home of Consigliere Agazzi, where Amalia and Dina, wife and daughter of the Consigliere, feel that they were snubbed by their new neighbour, Mrs. Frola, mother-in-law of the new provincial secretary, Mr. Ponza (employee of Agazzi). But their real intention was to verify some gossip about the Ponza-Frola family. They want to know why Mr. Ponza and his wife do not live with Mrs. Frola, who lives next door to the Agazzis. Rumour has it that Mrs. Frola is not permitted to see her daughter. Friends of the Agazzis arrive, announcing that the Ponza-Frola family has become the topic of gossip. Mr. Ponza arrives, and is forced to reveal his family's situation. He states that Mrs. Frola is insane. She became mad four years ago when her daughter, Ponza's first wife, passed away. Some time later, Frola saw Ponza with his new wife, and became obsessed with the idea that this woman was her daughter. Since this seemed to alleviate her madness, Ponza and his second wife had no choice but to keep her illusion alive, so Mrs. Ponza pretends to be Frola's daughter, but will not live with her. Ponza leaves and Mrs. Frola enters with another explanation. She states that Mr. Ponza is insane. After his marriage to Frola's daughter, Ponza became so obsessive that he was destroying his wife's physical and mental health. The doctors had Frola's daughter secretly hospitalized in a clinic. Not finding his wife at home, Ponza became hysterical, and was convinced she was dead. When Frola's daughter returned home, Ponza insisted that she was not his wife; his wife was dead. In order to reunite the couple, a second wedding had to be simulated. According to Frola, Mr. Ponza is convinced that her daughter is a different woman. Who is telling the truth? Who is insane?

Pirandello uses this play not only to explore the idea of madness, but also to investigate the complex questions surrounding identity, knowledge and truth. He underscores the complexities of our multi-faceted identities, and shows how society's rigid structures shape both identity and truth. Since the Ponza-Frola family does not fit society's normative standards, one or all must be mad. Naturally, the townspeople stop at nothing in order to uncover the "truth" (i.e. which of the two, Mr. Ponza or Mrs. Frola, is really mad). Their futile search for the truth is not only a reflection of the traditional methods of reason and logic, but also of traditional psychology, which believes that by probing deeper, it will arrive at the "hidden truths" of who we really are. In this play, Pirandello parodies these systems and beliefs, and challenges society's preconceived notions of madness, identity and truth.

Bio:

Ernesto Virgulti is Associate Professor of Italian in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures, where he teaches a variety of courses in Italian Language, Literature, Cinema and Pedagogy. His research and publications include Medieval European and Italian Literature (especially Boccaccio's Decameron), Literary Theory (Narratology, Semiotics), Cinema, and two co-edited volumes on Images and Imagery. He is Director of the Italian Program and Interim Director of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Brock.

Roundtable Participant: David Vivian (Brock University)

(See bottom of document for an abstract of the roundtable discussion)

Bio:

Assistant Professor and Resident Designer since 2004 in Brock's Department of Dramatic Arts, David pursues research in marginalized and virtual spaces through the visual arts and his design of theatre and film across Canada, the application of digital technologies to the collection of performance ephemera, regional identity construction and transmission through scenographic practice and research, and teaches theatrical design, stagecraft, and Collective Creation for

Theatre at Brock. His work at Brock has included designs for Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible' in an Age of Terror, the Japanese Noh play Tenko, Our Country's Good, The Arabian Trilogy, Ring Round the Moon, Unity (1918), and most recently he designed the department's mainstage production of Peter Weiss' Marat/Sade, directed by Virginia Reh.

David is a convener of the Scenography Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research. As a Director and the Secretary of OISTAT SRC/CRS (Société de recherche du Canada de l'Organisation internationale des scénographes, techniciens et architectes de théâtre Canada Research Society, incorporated in British Columbia) he was a coordinator of the participation of Canadian Schools of Theatre in the Prague Quadrennial of Scenography in 2007. Member of APASQ, he holds a Masters in Fine Arts from the University of British Columbia and is a graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada.

Guest Artists: Workman Arts Project

About:

The mission of the Workman Arts Project is to support aspiring, emerging and established artists with mental illness and addiction issues who are committed to developing and refining their art form and promoting a greater understanding of mental illness and addiction through film, theatre, painting, music and the literary arts. The Workman Arts Project of Ontario (Workman Arts) was founded in 1988 on the principle that the creative process is integral to the quest for personal and spiritual development. Workman Arts is a not-for-profit professional arts company working in partnership with and located in the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto's Art and Design District.

Roundtable Participant: Kelly Wolf (Brock University)

(See bottom of document for an abstract of the roundtable discussion)

Bio:

Kelly has designed sets and costumes for many Canadian theatre companies and her work ranges a variety of styles and periods. Notable productions include The Wars- costumes, A Christmas Carol- costumes (Theatre Calgary) The Last Five Years (CanStage, MTC and Theatre & Company) , The Scarlet Pimpernel- costumes, The Hunchback of Notre Dame- costumes (Stratford Festival), Edwin Drood- costumes, John Bull's Other Island- set, The Apple Cart, S.S. Tenacity (Shaw Festival), Tons of Money, Fiddler on the Roof- costumes (Drayton Entertainment) Blithe Spirit (Theatre Aquarius), The Domino Heart-set (Tarragon Theatre), Three Squares and Descent (Theatre Passe Muraille). Member of ADC. Kelly has designed and taught at Ryerson, Humber, Brock and Mountview Theatre School. Graduate of York University and Central Saint Martin's College and is currently working on her MA at the Drama Centre at the University of Toronto.

Plenary Roundtable Abstract:

How does our environment affect us and at what point is it a factor in the maddening of our society? The creative team for Marat/Sade (the first mainstage production of the Department of Dramatic Arts 2007-2008 season) began their production development with some assumptions about the pre-eminent and common notion of madness as illness. Through research and rehearsal they discovered an understanding of the function of space and community in the construction and performance of madness. This was a madness found outside the pathology written into textbooks of diagnosis and the team's discussions with Professor Stan Sadava of the Department of Psychology facilitated a deepened understanding of these issues. The company of actors became obsessed with the simplest manipulation of objects in theatricalised situations: this directly informed the 'madness' in the time and place of the show. The Director (Virginia Reh) and the Designer (David Vivian) of Marat/Sade will speak to their discoveries in a roundtable discussion with the Director (David Fancy) and Designer (Kelly Wolf), of The Skriker, the second mainstage

production of the Department. When designing the *The Skriker*, the Designer explored how people have affected the living environment of our Earth and how the living in a mutated world has affected our perception of the world and our behaviour within it. *The Skriker* is often set within an insane asylum, as though the Skriker is merely a figment of one's imagination. What happens if we acknowledge however that these spirits live among us? Do we perceive them as the environment's response, a crying out to the world about all that humanity has done to damage it? Are we (as occupants of the planet) adding to the increasing madness of the world? Rather than merely dismissing the character's behaviour as madness we are looking at it as a warning to our generation to attempt to reverse the impact humanity has had on our Earth. As also examined in the first mainstage production, the Director (David Fancy) and the Designer (Kelly Wolf) will discuss how they propose that our living environment might contribute to perceptions of madness in society and how they proceed to translate this to the stage in a theatrical manner.