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Imaging Madness: Inter-ships *Mieke Bal* Inter-mediality is just another form of “inter-ship” that, like the international life I lead, the inter-disciplinary work I do, in particular inter-arts analysis, the inter-generational trauma I will come to talk about, the inter-temporal mutuality I have called “pre-posterous history”: all these, like the inherent inter-mediality of audio-visual media, indicate relationships, mutuality, exchange and dialogue, more than plurality, multitude, and whatever is indicated through the preposition “trans-.” I insist on the specific relationality of “inter-” and its distinctive operations between the members it connects. I am interested in how images help articulate and embody thought. I contend that images can perform an equivalent of speech acts; that they can respond (“speak back”) to the look cast onto them, and that they can entice viewers to theorize. They are performative. They do something; they act. I call such "speaking images," which speak back, resist (parts of) my interpretation of them, and make me think, "theoretical objects."[1]

I took this view one step further when, in an inter-ship for which I have not yet a name, I began to supplement my research into contemporary (migratory) culture with filmmaking. I considered (documentary) filmmaking as a form of research. The term "auto-theory" indicates a form of thinking that integrates my own practice of image-making as a form of thinking, and reflecting on what I have made as a continuation of the making. Auto-theory is not self-indulgent navel gazing because of the concept of images as performative that underlies it, and through which the relationship between the films and the intellectual reflection remains dialogic. The present essay is an example of auto-theory in this sense.

It is widely known that the concept of performativity has been taken up in philosophy and cultural studies, particularly in feminist and queer studies, under the influence primarily of Judith Butler. Following Derrida's commentary on Austin's concept, Butler emphasized that it is not the exceptional speech act—"I declare war," "I declare you husband and wife"—but the routine, reiterated speech acts that determine who one is, including sexually. The habits of reiteration are open to (slow) change, however. Precisely by inhabiting a routine one can change it from within.[2]

Images, the ensemble of images we call visual culture, participate in those routines and their changes. This performativity is significant more generally for images that, according to our ontological distinctions, do not (materially) exist, as is the case, at least in part, with the inter-ship I wish to discuss here, a propos of the film Mère folle. A second topic in this presentation will be the way in which space—again, taken to be performative—can be considered a medium. This has been experimented with in the video installation *The Space In-Between*, derived from the material of the film and exhibited in video exhibitions, including in DIT's Broadcast Gallery (November 2011).

There was a series of images that came out of an activity of reading. This "coming out of reading" happened twice over. First, an author wrote a book in which she described images that came out of her own readings. Second, I read that book, and images—the same ones? different ones?—came out of my reading of her readings. Except for the cover image, a detail from Pieter Breughel the Elder's painting *Dulle Griet* (Mad Meg, 1562), there were no images, in the material sense, included in the book. Yet, these written images were so strong that after seeing them with my mind's eye I had to make them, as "after-images" that were interpretants of the images evoked but not presented—even though technically, the book was a theoretical treatise.[3]

I use the term interpretant in the sense in which American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce theorized the sign, in order to make the point that images can be signs even if they are not materially extant. Peirce starts his definition of the sign with a perceptible object. The question posed by this object—"What does it mean?"—cannot be answered by revealing something inherent in the object. Instead, the cultural group in which the object circulates works the meaning out in a practice that yields a second, further developed object. That second object, or sign, is the interpretant, a new sign developed on the basis of, and evoked by, the attempt to understand the first sign.[4] Objects, hence also images, are active participants in the performance of analysis in that they enable reflection and speculation. They can contradict projections and wrong-headed interpretations (if the analyst lets them), and thus constitute a theoretical object with philosophical relevance, whether materially embodied or not. Hence, reflecting "from within," as maker, on how these processes work is an activity steeped in a larger cultural context, not a self-indulgent intellectual autism.

There are two further reasons why "auto-theory" is not individualistic self-reflection, and the images involved, by definition themselves subject to "inter-." First, filmmaking is never something one does alone. For Mère folle, we had, for example, actors, both volunteers and professionals, we had help with script, camera, sound, translation, and there were people who made a superb website for the project.[5] But most importantly, I am making this film with British artist Michelle Williams Gamaker. Michelle and I have been collaborating since 2002, the beginning of my practice in filmmaking, when Michelle was already a practicing (video) artist. Hence, when I use the

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[1] For the idea of the performativity of images, modelled on speech act theory, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Second Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971);1962. Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002). For the concept of '"theoretical object,'" see Hubert Damisch in Bois, Yve-Alain, et al. 'A Conversation with Hubert Damisch,' October 85, (Summer), 1998: 3-17.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, Il: Northwestern University Press, 1988); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2006); *Bodies That Matter*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2011). For an excellent overview of this travel of the concept of performativity, see Jonathan Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative,' *Poetics Today*, vol. 21, no. 3, (Fall) 2000: 503-519. See also the chapter "Performance and Performativity" in my book *Travelling concepts in the humanities: a Rough guide*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002)

[3] Françoise Davoine, 1998. The film and installations are co-authored. Mieke Bal & Michelle Williams Gamaker, 2011, *A Long History of Madness.* HD digital video, colour, sound, 120 minutes. Multilingual, subtitles English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Finnish, Russian. Distributed by Films d'Atalante, Paris.

[4] See, for example, Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,' *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, edited and with an introduction by J. Buchler, (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).

[5] www.crazymothermovie.com, dir. Olli Heinola, Juho Heinola

pronoun "I" it should be heard as "we" in most cases. I cannot use "we" as this pronoun has been marred by the universalist "we" that strives to create a "we-feeling" that is in turn liable to constitute an exclusive audience and its manipulated benevolence. That is why I avoid it here. What I am going to say about the film is my own responsibility—hence the persistence of "I"—while the film as such is a collective work, and specifically the work of Michelle and myself in an equal partnership.[6]

Second, there is another intense partnership involved, which bears on the status and the nature of the images. The film is a "translation" of a book by French psychoanalyst Françoise Davoine, an act that has turned out best served in close collaboration with the author. The images she "saw," or had in mind, when she wrote her book are inevitably very different from the ones that ended up in the film. There are several layers of interpretation and imagination between the one and the other. This is compounded by the fact that the author plays herself; but only after the images had circulated, and Michelle and I have transformed them, did they come back to the author, from the outside so to speak, who, playing her role, transformed them again. This is why the film images can only be what I call "after-images," with several temporal and visual layers separating the "original" from the images in the film.[7]

My attempt to develop "auto-theory" as a worthy methodological tool is also in line with a specific conception of the fundamental inter-temporality of images. Even a material painting existed once only in the artist's mind, and then came off on canvas much different. That material painting then changes again with each act of viewing projected upon it, with time, place, and social circumstance of its subsequent "life" as a work of art. An image, in this sense, will always be in the process of "becoming." By that Deleuzian term I mean something quite specific. Not only each artwork, but a priori the entire oeuvre of an artist is and remains in the process of becoming. The becoming of an oeuvre implies a retrospective temporal logic according to which each new work recasts the terms in which the previous works could be understood. For example, a next phase of becoming, at the same time as a preposterous dialogue between an earlier moment and our film, is the video installation *Anacronismos/Anachronisms* we made for a commission of the Guggenheim Bilbao museum (2010).[8] Each new phase of that becoming is informed by a later work that retrospectively glosses an earlier work. Each new work puts a spin on the ensemble of what came before it. In that becoming as an oeuvre or a work consisting of multiple images, my theoretical object is the body of images named Mère folle, inflected by what "my work"—as a reader, co-filmmaker, and critic of the resulting images—adds to and changes in that corpus. And, according to the retrospective logic I have elsewhere called "preposterous," the beginning or starting point is the set of filmic images, followed by the images "we saw," only then followed by those in the author's book and ending with those images the author "saw," and that are fundamentally inaccessible to me. It is this retrospective impact that is the point of studying an image as a source of further and more profound insight than the usual documentation can offer.[9]

Imaging Madness

This leads to the question: can one "image" madness? Davoine's book, written in the first person, hovers between fiction and theory and integrates the best of both. We considered it a "theoretical fiction," the term Freud uses frequently, for example, to explain the genre of Totem and Taboo, his story of the primitive band of sons in revolt, killing and eating the tyrannical father.[10] Sometimes, Freud's story intimates, it takes fiction or other forms of imaginative thought to understand that for which reason is too simple. This underwrites my deployment of video art to further analyse what cannot be studied easily in documentation. Davoine's book, too, has theoretical points to make and uses speculation and fiction to develop, articulate, and make them, and subsequently so has (and does) our film. But, unlike Freud's primary tool of plot, Davoine's points are primarily made through images, not through discussion. The plot itself, not absent, serves, rather, to frame the images.[11]

Like Davoine's auto-fictional book—but not in the same autobiographical form—the film stages the inter-ship or intertwinement of two confrontations. One occurs between a psychoanalyst and her severely traumatized ("mad") patients. The other confronts this contemporary world with medieval Fools, agents of a late-medieval political theatre. Most of the

[6] Marianna Torgovnick, 'The Politics of the We,' *South Atlantic Quarterly 91*, (Winter) 1992. Torgovnick writes of the slide into we as "a covert, and sometimes coercive, universal"... the full deceptiveness of the false cultural 'we'." (265) As members of the collective Cinema Suitcase, Michelle Williams Gamaker and I collaborated on the films *Mille et un jours* (2004), *Colony* (2007), and *Becoming Vera* (2008). We have both made other films with other members of the collective, as well as individually (www.cinemasuitcase.com).

[7] I am aware that the more common term is "adaptation." However, I choose to consider the film a translation, because of the specific issue the activity of translation entails, according to the Benjaminian stream of thought I engage here. Among many studies of adaptation, the following collection deserves attention. See Robert Stam and Allessandra Raengo, (eds.) 2005 *Literature and Film: the Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, (Adapation. New York: Blackwell, 2005).

[8] On "becoming," see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. tr. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,. 1987), where they use that term throughout. For an argument about the transformative nature of images that supports an anti-intentionalist position, see Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002, 253-85). On the retrospective logic as a historical perspective, see M. Bal, ed. *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press,my 1999).

[9] An additional temporal layer occurred when the actors, inspired by the group performance, started to improvise and make their own images, beyond enacting the roles assigned to them. Although author and filmmakers remain relatively independent from each other, it is relevant to realize that the preposterous logic I have developed as a historical approach squares perfectly with Davoine's conception of history, particularly (but not exclusively) as it plays itself out in madness. See the clip "Françoise on Time" on the video section of the film's website, as well as many remarks in her books: *La mère folle* (Paris: Arcanes Recherche Psychanalytique (1992, 1998), *La folie Wittgenstein*, (Paris: Du Croquant, 2012), among others;, 2008), and the scenography of

time, these two worlds mingle. The theoretical and political importance of the film lies in a positive representation of mad (or psychotic) people and a constructive interaction between mad and sane people through which both learn things from the other that help them to live their lives. Within the film, medieval Fools strike precisely that balance. This motivates their participation. Hence, in this inter-temporally ambiguous representation of "madness"—rather than in relation to the book as such—our first allegiance was positioned.

Only a carefully thought-through image of the Fools and their contemporary counterparts, the Mad, can do justice to this allegiance. To achieve this, an ontological uncertainty with bearing on epistemology was our primary guideline. The Fools raise an ontological question that also bears on the status of the images and what they convey in their various inter-ships. The Fools are not mad but play the fool. So how do we know what "being mad" is, and whether that is different from playing? Can you play what you are, and be, or become, what you play? This is the theoretical question that undermines the authority of the archaeological thrust of psychoanalysis. It lies at the heart of Davoine's social approach to psychoanalysis, her attempt to make the theory and practice less individualistic and do justice to psychoanalysis as a profoundly social science. And it is what makes the psychoanalytic space a medium, as we attempt to show with the installation.

For us, as filmmakers, this question was doubled by another one, concerning intermediality: how can we make that unknowability or undecidability itself visible, convincing, and productive? The book integrates theory, fiction, and documentary. Here lies the debt the film and its images have towards the book. As a "faithful" intermedial translation, the film owes it to the book to make that integration of traditionally separate domains visible, and to the book as theoretical object in the sense described above, to draw conclusions, visual and otherwise, from that integration.[12]

Storying Madness

Film is an uncompromisingly temporal medium. This translation was possible because there is also a story: not as a fiction for its own sake but

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her encounters with people from the past registered there.

[10] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A. A. Bril, (New York: Moffat Yard and Company, 1918)

[11] The idea that images are received, rather than created by the author, was suggested to me by Kaja Silverman's recent book *Flesh of my Flesh*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), in which she discusses this attitude of artists apropos of Rilke (2009). Davoine's book is an extraordinary integration of theory and images, "facts" and fiction. Among other advantages, such as more subtlety and strong identification, this integration allowed the author to do justice to the lived experiences in the case histories of her patients without being the dominating one who writes them.

[12] This is quite a heavy task, especially if we also consider Benjamin's paradoxical view of translation. "While content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and

as a frame for these images, a setting for the madness, and a focus for the staging of the "mad." The story, in book and film, runs as follows. After a taste of the practice of psychoanalysis, the analyst's opening words tell us that "tomorrow is All Saints' Day." That makes "today" the Day of the Dead. As it happens, Françoise has just learned of the death by overdose of one of her psychotic patients. Discouraged, she blames herself and psychoanalysis for this tragic failure. She enters a deep crisis. She is tempted to abandon her job at the psychiatric hospital. While pondering this decision in the courtyard of the hospital, she takes a book on the Middle Ages out of her bag. It is a book that her dead patient had requested she bring to him. As she rummages through her bag and finds the book, the enigmatic figure of Mère Folle appears—as if out of the book, as its interpretant. A number of medieval Fools accost Françoise, challenging psychoanalysis as fraudulent. Their primary grievance is the privileging of word over gesture, the individual over the group, and the past over the present. Their leader, Mère Folle, is depressed because the Fools do not obey her anymore. She sits down in silence. With a wink to iconography, she takes the pose of Dürer's famous engraving *Melencolia I* (1514). In the film, the apparition of the Fools out of the book is embedded in the entire scene in the courtyard. In turn, this scene comes out of the contemplation, in the hospital in Finland, of Brueghel the Elder's painting by the psychoanalyst treating Sissi, Françoise's first patient who, like Freud's Dora, had dismissed her as incompetent. Thus, the film confounds any attempt to construct temporality as linear.[13]

A discussion ensues in which a dead-pan Françoise remains situated in the present without being astonished by the confrontation with another historical time, and responds as if in discussion with colleagues. It is this ability to remain her professional self while engaging with other times and their discourses that is her primary strength, both as an actress and as an analyst. It is her own unique inter-ship. That discrepancy in tone was our interpretation of the rather even tone of the argumentative prose in the book, in spite of the exuberance of the descriptive parts. We translated this tone into the main character's calm acting, although the text does not reflect on it per se.[14] But we had to visualize a point that the book makes constantly

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its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds," Walter Benjamin writes in "The Task of the Translator" (*Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt. [London: Pimlico, 1999], 761968, 75). See also the discussion in Jacques Derrida1983 (93-161). For an extensive discussion of Benjamin's text, see Chapter Two of Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities.*

[13] Freud's Dora case has been extensively interpreted. See, for example, Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*, (London: Virago, 1985). There are serious issues involving a lack of empathy on the part of the analyst. In Françoise's case, Sissi blames her for refusing identification. Later, the analyst is able to see the justification of that blame.

[14] The author, the

yet only implicitly, which is the ontological uncertainty, mentioned before, of madness between enactment, being, and being-perceived. From this uncertainty the film derives its philosophical experiment. Since playing the fool is the Fools' profession, this took a specifically theatrical form, in an inter-arts probing of the relationships between theatre and cinema. The film shows how the Fools can no longer be separated from the Mad. These begin to mingle with them, even to chant comments drawn from medieval poems under the direction of the Musical Nurse who tries to calm them with their own means, all of this adding to the panic of the Head Nurse.[15]

But a professional crisis is harder to actually live than Françoise had thought. The fools end up irritating her out of her determination to resign from her job, and reluctantly she returns to work. There she is caught by her affection for and identification with the patients and the occasional success of a treatment. As she talks with patients, the distinction between the Fools and the Mad fades away slowly. This ontological uncertainty of madness is made visible by several means, one of which is the quite simple ploy of actors playing multiple roles. The most striking instance of this is the performance by French actor Thomas Germaine. In the courtyard he shows up among the Fools under the name of Antonin (later, his last name turns out to be Artaud), a self-proclaimed although anachronistic friend of sixteenth-century writer Étienne de la Boétie. As the latter cannot speak, Antonin speaks for him. In the hospital scene, Germaine is a patient, also called Antonin. And in the trial, he acts out Artaud's combination of genius and madness.

At this point one already wonders if these figures are one, two, or three persons. Moreover, at the beginning and towards the end of the film Germaine shows up at Françoise's office as a homeless man seeking treatment, and the short treatment they undertake together is successful. His name is Herlat, another name for Harlequin, the King of Death that Mère Folle conjures up during the trial, at which point, however, not Harlequin but Artaud appears. All these characters may or may not be the same "person."

The medium of space, performative as it is, shapes each appearance differently. This questions the ontology of personhood embedded in the

main character-narrator, and the actress are the same person. For clarity's sake I will use the first name "Françoise" when speaking about the character, actress, and narrator, and use her last name "Davoine" when talking about the author of the book.

[15] Since we had a micro-budget for the film, we mostly had to work with volunteer actors. The Musical Nurse (Leticia Bal) is a professional musician (www.rumbadama.nl) but amateur actress, while the Head Nurse is a prominent professional actress (Olga Zuiderhoek) who generously donated her time for the project.

questioning of madness and brings to this question another philosophical relevance. What is at stake in this playful enactment is the notion of the individual subject itself. And, since the book proposes a theory of a social psychoanalysis, where the small histories of the patients converge with the tragedies of History, this questioning through casting is loyal to the book's theoretical thrust.[16]

Meanwhile, Françoise is abducted by two Mafiosi and so begins a strange voyage. She is taken to the Middle Ages—or rather, the Middles Ages surface in the present, in a small, somewhat shabby Parisian theatre. There, Françoise is brought before a court where she is blamed for her lack of insight, and psychoanalysis' repression of gesture in favour of words. The episodes of that court case confront her, and us, with the sane reasoning behind the Fool's mask. The alleged fools come from the tradition of "sotties," a political theatre from the late Middle Ages, a kind of carnival of Fools. These are the Fools who merged with the patients at the hospital. Their arrival thus becomes a political moment.[17]

As opposed to the patients, the fools have impunity. Françoise, consistent in her in-betweenness, cannot help herself listening and discussing these issues seriously. During the trial, in the form of imaginary or dreamt dialogues, the narrator's own literary and philosophical sources also mix in with great thinkers such as Antonin Artaud, Ludwig Wittgenstein, TS Eliot. There is even a glimpse of Friedrich Nietzsche.[18]

For the narrator, this dialogic traversal of time is also a return to her own past. Her boundaries—in time, space, and identity—melt down. The relevance of this undermining of individuality becomes clear when she becomes capable of identifying not only with her patients, in whose adventures she begins to participate, but also with her former self. To underline the difficulty of this connection the younger Françoise speaks Spanish, a "mother tongue" different to her French.

Two patients from the past stroll through Françoise's world when she least expects it. These are a woman named Sissi—doctor Davoine's first failure of twenty years ago—and the timeless, elfish Ariste who dies at the beginning only to resurface regularly throughout the film as an "inspector" (or as Françoise's bruised super-ego), as a source of gossip, and as a

[16] The anti-individualism that permeates the book, and that the film represents by many different means, is its primary philosophical point, as well as its proposal for clinical psychoanalysis. For a philosophical questioning of the individual subject, see Cadava et al. eds. *Who Comes After the Subject?* (London: Routledge, 1991)

[17] The shabby character of the theatre fits the street character of the Fools' theatrical practice. It goes against the grain of the cultural dominance Pierre Bourdieu has termed "distinction" (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by R Nice, [Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985]).1984). The scene of the Trial conforms subtly to the traditional genre of the "sotie." See Jean-Claude Aubailly, *Le Monologue, le dialogue et la sottie*, (Paris: H. Champion, 1976) and Jelle Koopmans, *Le théâtre des exclus au Moyen Âge*, (Paris, Imago, 1997).

[18] An excellent social-cultural study of the sotties in the Netherlands, and its continuity with carnival, is Herman Pleij 2007 *De eeuw van*

memory. These two phantom patients constantly confront Françoise with the difficulty of her work and the danger, yet likelihood, of failure. Ariste becomes Françoise's spectre in the combined philosophical and sociological-political sense put forward by Derrida, his death a sacrifice to earn insight into the importance of identification, a kind of gift.[19]

From these combined travels Françoise gains the ability to practice immersion into the deliria of her patients, in order to become a fraternal equal to them. Only through such an "extreme identification" will she be able to carve for them an auxiliary space wherein the "catastrophic regions" that generated their madness can be confronted. Throughout the story, the narrator has been doing precisely that, becoming an equal to the "fools" and the "mad."[20]

It is on this hopeful note that, during the turmoil of the Carnival of Basel, the immersion into the medieval universe of folly, the story ends. Between the trial and the Carnival, Françoise's day is not over. She continues to treat Herlat, then pays an overdue visit to the grave of her former teacher, the sister of her father's Resistance friend, inveterate Spanish freedom fighter Don Luis, as well as to that of the latter's "mad aunt," who also haunts her childhood memories.

Theoretical considerations, initially only occurring in the mind of the narrator, will be taken over by fools, colleagues, patients. Thus, the film produces theory: a theory of madness as bound up with historical catastrophe; of psychoanalysis as an emphatically social science and practice; of the individual subject as fatally but also, helpfully porous, inseparable from other subjects; of images and their capacity of speech; of speech as imaged and imaginative.

Socializing Madness

With these complexities in mind, you will not be surprised that for Michelle and me it was as difficult as it was important to remain loyal, not so much to the book as to our own desire to make a film based on it. The theoretical thrust compelled certain visual decisions that, at first sight, have little to do with theory. Here, I want to discuss some of these decisions as a contribution to the question of how images help intellectual work, the question of subjectivity as crucially social, and the inter-ship between cinema and theory.

The first, major intervention concerned the individualism and the linguistic bias that the Fools impute to Françoise. But her entire project is a battle against the individualism that keeps the Mad impermeable to psychoanalysis, and cuts them off from society. Instead, her life's work consists of attempts to preserve psychoanalysis as a social science. In the book this discussion, obviously, can only remain verbal, although it is, narratologically speaking, astonishingly "jumpy," interrupted by small occurrences and verbal punning, misunderstandings and anachronistic "errors," and never leading to a compromise or resolution. Here, a dilemma arises that determines how the film can contribute to insight into sociality: do we do justice to the discussion, to the author's project, or to the story, in our intermedial work?[21]

In Davoine's book, the story concerns Françoise's crisis and the voyage of discovery that leads to her insight. It is a kind of Bildungsroman or travel story, what the Spanish created in the tradition of the picaresque novel. If this form were respected in detail, the film would become too centred on a single character. In particular, this form would not do justice to the fact that in Françoise's eyes the Fools have a point. We deployed several levels of dispersal in order to avoid an individualistic, autobiographical interpretation of a story that, in fact, harbours important theoretical insights that go against individualism. Thus we sought to revise the very notion of autobiography; in particular, the auto of it. These dispersals make the story more general while preserving the singularity of the characters involved. This was our first, primary act of loyalty-by-betrayal.[22]

Another dispersal concerns language. The film is multilingual. Actors from different countries speak their own languages. The multilingual speeches became images of a multi-cultural Europe, as well as of a certain kind of social madness present in the contemporary world. At the same time, they became almost utopian images of the possibility to communicate against all odds. The psychoanalyst's dilemma, for example, is shared by other psychoanalysts. Here, the intermediality itself is theoretically relevant: images build bridges because they help to communicate across the

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de zotheid. Over de nar als maatschappelijk houvast in de vroegmoderne tijd, (Amsterdam: Bert bakker, 2007). The book, and, to a lesser extent, the film contain many quotations from Artaud's (1958 [1938]) *The Theater and Its Double*, (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

19. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Wills, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). On the importance and risks of empathy and identification see Dominick LaCapra, especially 2001, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) and Jill Bennett, 2005 *Empathic Vision: Art, Politics, Trauma*, (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2005).

20. The notion of "extreme identification" was Michelle's and my interpretation of Davoine's method. The term "catastrophic regions" is Davoine's.

21. See Peter Verstraten, *Film Narratology*, trans. S. van der Lecq, for a film narratology that is consistent with my own narratological concepts in Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

22. The second analyst is played by Marjo Vuorela, also a real-life psychoanalyst. Françoise Davoine commented on this point: "I feel not betrayed but expanded" (augmentée, personal communication, January 3, 2010). Many of our interventions started out as need, were compelled by circumstance and received theoretical support retrospectively,

boundaries that separate the sane from the mad, the contemporary from earlier times, and different cultural and linguistic communities from each other. The psychoanalyst establishes a connection, however briefly, between the function of images and the accumulative effect of the oral transmission of poetry. The tension in this multilingualism between a utopian vision and a certain kind of madness became a rich source of inter-play with the ambivalence of the book toward classical psychoanalysis, the uncertainty of madness, and contemporary European reality.[23]

Former patients of doctor Davoine are now either independent or live in a "half-way house" where they are getting ready to re-integrate into society, elsewhere, under the guidance of other psychoanalysts. As an example of a visual-linguistic pun that makes a theoretical point tangible, this house is in "the North," because retrouver le nord is the French phrase for coming to your senses. Just as the patients there struggle to come to their senses, so does psychiatry.

As I mentioned in the interview, to film this half-way house we ended up on the historically layered Seili Island, a small island off the coast of Turku, Finland. The sense of the place gives a peek into the layering of history in the present. On this island, a former leprosy hospital had been converted into a hospital for the insane, only to close in 1962, an embodiment of Foucault's *History of Madness*. After the disappearance of leprosy in that part of the world, the old hospital cared for the mad (mostly of the lower classes and more often women than men), who were never to return home to the mainland. A chilling requirement for admission, we learned, was that patients bring their own coffin. This is one example of how setting contributes to a further—in this case, historical—clarification of the bond between madness and society.[24]

Indeed, an aspect that matters enormously for filmmaking is setting. It is where the scenography can be inscribed. Apart from their obvious movement, film images are set in spaces that have continuous presence and, hence, a function in a film as much as in society. We needed to evoke what Mexican psychoanalyst Alberto Montoya Hernández has called "landscapes of madness." This beautifully ambiguous concept refers both to the imaginary places in which madness elects to situate itself, and to images of landscapes that appear mad or are hospitable to the Mad. Through this concept, madness can be placed firmly in the world.[25]

We wished the landscape of madness to be both full of the real history of madness and slightly anachronistic, in order to connect it to the contemporary social world. Two parts of the film are set in psychiatric hospitals: the treatment of Sissi by another analyst and the work Françoise does once she returns to her job. The location for the first part is an obsolete psychiatric institution in Nokia, Finland, called Pitkäniemi Hospital. It is reminiscent of the hospital at Seili. The location for the other part is in Amsterdam, the Netherlands: an art deco building housing an art school, with large echoing spaces that respond to the idea of collective treatment in more ways than one. The images show that this cannot be what is known as group therapy, because the patients are too deeply immersed in their madness to connect to each other. This isolation, in turn, comes across through the echoing sound characteristic of the large halls, which makes for difficult understanding. The echo surrounds each patient with an isolating auditory halo.

The patients' only sociality is with Françoise, a situation that burdens the latter with the responsibility to begin restoring sociality with and for them. Thus, a drawback of that particular location—its terrible acoustics—ends up contributing to making concrete, to auditively "image," the central problem in madness according to Davoine's book: the broken social bonds that leave the patients in what she calls "catastrophic regions," a term that resonates with Montoya Hernández's "landscapes of madness." For Davoine, these regions—mental and geographical as well as historical—harbour the violence that generates madness, sometimes generations later.[26]

These sites are "turned mad" by the discrepancies between the normal goings-on and the interference wrought by the Fools. Seili Island and its hospital convey the sense of isolation that is a silent stream in the film. In the South of Spain, we set the visit Françoise pays to Don Luis, the old family friend and Resistance fighter, in order to broaden the scope of the historical violence invoked. Here, a visit to the cemetery dates the film to that long 31st of October, the Day of the Dead, as well as placing it against that other *paisaje de la locura* that was the Spanish Civil War. These are

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or half-way through the making of the film. But I will not go into the adventures of a micro-budget film production here.

[23] There is an obvious connection between this multilingualism and my video installation "Nothing is Missing," (see http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/installations/nothing-is-missing/)

[24] Thanks to Mia Hannula of the University of Turku, whose constant support and help has been indispensable to us. The beautiful documentary "Women of Seili" by Mikaela Weurlander (2008), which we saw only later, gives background information about the hospital that converges astonishingly with our film. The primary source on this "invention" of madness as a hospitable disease after leprosy remains Michel Foucault. The English edition of his *Madness and Civilization* is an abridged version of *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique,* originally published in 1961. A full English translation titled *History of Madness* was published by Routledge in 2006

[25] On the sociology of space, a feminist perspective is offered by ElisabethElizabeth Grosz in *Space, Time and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies.* (New York: Routledge, 1995). On the concept of "landscapes of madness," see Alberto Montoya Hernández, 2006. *Paisajes de la locura.* (México: Paradigma, 2006).

[26] The bond between landscape and social life has been brought to the fore by the work of social geographers, of which Edward Soja's 1989 book *Postmodern Geographies* has been a pioneering instance. See also his more recent *Postmetropolis* (2000). These studies do not specifically focus on madness and/as landscape, but relating these two fields would be a

settings where, precisely, history can act up again, as it does in the lives of the patients.[27]

But, in spite of the complicity of such settings, the film helps us think precisely because it is not realistic in the traditional sense. It actively avoids this rhetorical mode. We have several reasons for this avoidance of straightforward realism. A realist reading will fail to do justice to the inextricable bond between the film and the reality it critically engages—the most important inter-ship. I am even inclined to generalize this point: realism by definition distorts, obscures, and otherwise bypasses the bond between art—or literary works—and reality. That bond, complex and questionable as it is, remains a primary requirement for art to matter socially.[28]

In the same vein, we maintain the term "Mad" for the characters that hover in a state of patienthood. The clearest synonym of this word is "mentally ill," rather than the American euphemism "mentally disabled," or worse, "challenged." Whereas "ill" is a cultural diagnosis of a state that does not preclude competent agency, "disabled" is precisely the opposite of what the characters turn out to be, and suggests permanence; as the film shows, the mad are rather hyper-abled.[29]

Rather than avoiding the language, society is in need of different views of a phenomenon that has a history. For this revision of the views the old term may be more useful, reminding us as it does of the dangers inherent in the views they express, not in the terms *per se*. Thus, such euphemisms do the opposite of performing retrospection; they erase what needs to be re-visioned. The authentication of psychosis compels a commitment to such a strongly historical yet reversed, or "preposterous," politics of time.[30]

The impossibility of realism—its fundamental unrealness—is most clearly demonstrated by the "actual" psychoanalytic treatments we staged. As mentioned, in the course of the film there are two supposedly completed treatments of patients: a shorter one of a man called Herlat, taking place in Françoise's office, at the beginning and toward the end of the film; and a longer treatment of Sissi, taking place throughout two-thirds of the film in Pitkäniemi Hospital. These two sequences insist upon the cinematic problem of realism. If played out earnestly, they would have to be

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worthwhile endeavour.

[27] One funny but revealing incident in present-day social reality demonstrates what a "landscape of madness" can be. When filming an incident of the Fools chased away from the public place, the actors playing cleaners who got rid of the medieval Fools were later approached by resident visitors of the Parisian flea market, who thanked them for getting rid of "those crazies." In other words, the action created a space where madness threatened to take over, and the guys in uniforms were automatically taken to be the authorities, who "saved" the market from madness.

[28] I am currently devoting three books to this question of the political force of art. One of these, *Of What One Cannot Speak* appeared in Spring 2011 from the University of Chicago Press. On realism, a philosophical inquiry into its bond with objectivism, see Hilary Putnam, 'The Craving for Objectivity,' *New Literary History* 15.2, (Winter) 1984: 229-239, and 'Objectivity and the Science/Ethics Distinction,' in *Realism with a Human Face*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[29] That other euphemism, "mentally challenged," again if literally interpreted, implies the possibility to wilfully improve the state of one's mind. All euphemisms based on this word "challenged" imply the worst connotations of the ideology of the

documentary in style, with the voyeurism that comes with it, and boring in length. If tampered with, as we were compelled to do, they might become demeaning to the seriousness of the pain of the (fictionalized) afflicted patients, thereby conforming to the usual caricature.

Schizophrenic Sissi, while coming from a very simple working-class family, imagines herself to be (a double of) the Empress of Austria-Hungary. This feature of the character became a great asset for visualization as well as empowerment. Instead of or in addition to having her talk about her imperial status and dignity, we dressed her in a variety of fancy clothes, different for each session, with fitting hairstyles and jewellery. As it turned out, and in no small measure thanks of the superb acting of Finnish actress Marja Skaffari, the moving moments in the treatment when Sissi is evoking extremely painful memories are set off against her exuberant dress with very convincing, indeed contagious, poignancy. Thus we were able to create a gripping image sequence, give Sissi her own voice, and stage her madness without demeaning her through the symbolic violence of representation.

Founding Violence

In an ordinary social context, violence is done to many on an everyday basis. Physical violence, the linguistic violence of hate speech, of the failure to listen and to acknowledge, to serve as the "second person" without whom subjectivity cannot mature, and the symbolic violence of representation: all these forms of violence have the potential to drive their victims mad. This potential constitutes another inter-ship, a porosity between "kinds" of people, a porosity that makes society even more eager to draw firm, fearful boundaries. What Mère Folle argues, demonstrates, and cinematically "inflicts" on its viewers is precisely the breakdown of those boundaries. The social relevance of madness lies in the uneasy but indispensable awareness of the generative bond between violence and madness.

Sissi, the film slowly and half-heartedly reveals—half-heartedly because her mental illness stands in the way of or shields her from full awareness—has been made mad by sexual abuse and parental neglect. Herlat's condition is bound up with war in previous generations of his family. Aziz, a Palestinian patient, has been driven to mad violence in response to

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American dream: challenges can be met; who fails is herself to blame. Euphemisms, well-meant as they are, are misguided attempts to take the sting out of language. They are misguided because, precisely through their erasure of negativity in their connotations, they erase the persistence of the socially current views the older terms express more honestly. For a general study of euphemisms, see Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, *Euphemism and Dysphemism: Language Used as Shield and Weapon*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[30] In addition to my book mentioned above, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* (1999), see Cesare Casarino, 'Time Matters: Marx, Negri, Agamben and the Corporeal,' Strategies: *Journal of the Theory, Culture and Politics* 16, no. 12, 2003: 185-206. Whilst mine is primarily art-theoretical, Casarino's article is perhaps best characterized as Foucauldian-Marxist.

politically enforced impotence. At the end of the film, the aging Don Luis explains to Françoise how close he came to madness in the concentration camp of Mauthausen.

The insight I find most important to draw from all these connections between violence and madness is what a cliché would phrase as “learning from the past”: something “we” (here in the universal sense) never quite manage. Psychoanalytic space is that space “in-between” where the past can become a new start instead of something that crushes us. The dead Ariste, who, in one moment, looks on at the scenes of madness played out before him, is the embodiment of that deadly, but potentially regenerative past. At another moment Sissi, as if emerging from the office door to which she seemed glued like a painting, embodying the two-dimensionality the hospital imposes on its patients, insists on the continued presence of the past in a shot that captured her in-between state perfectly. This is her opportunity to make a new start after having been stuck, to “get better,” as she says several times.

This simple insight is key to the question of the relationship between art and the political. It is not as if there is art, some of which happens to be political. Political art is art because it is political; it is art by virtue of its political “nature.” Neither art nor the political are defined by subject matter. They are domains of agency, where acting becomes possible and can have effects. In the case of political art, that agency is one and the same: it “works” as art because it works politically. My reflections have been devoted to the inseparability of those two elements, which nevertheless remain irreducible to one another. Political art shows that they can neither be equated nor severed. Instead, they deeply impact each other. Exploring what makes art political, I seek to explore where art’s political efficacy can be located: how it performs, how it exerts agency, and what the point is of art’s political agency for the larger domain of society. Art is itself an inter-ship.