

## *Preface*

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### BEGINNING

Françoise Davoine, author of many books—some with her partner Jean-Max Gaudillière—is an inspired writer of what I call, after Freud, “theoretical fiction.” In her primary incarnation, she is a French psychoanalyst specializing in the analytical treatment of traumatized people. Her work in this area is world-famous because the world keeps producing so much trauma that its treatment continues to be urgently needed. And Davoine’s work in this area is impressively successful. This is especially remarkable if we consider Freud’s own conviction that the trauma-generated psychosis—for reasons I will explain, I call it “madness”—cannot be analyzed. The key issue in this debate is the possibility of “psychotic” patients to perform the necessary transference.

Davoine’s success is due to her empathic, respectful, and at the same time, down-to-earth approach, but also to her great theoretical mind. For she is not only an effective clinical psychoanalyst but also, as her many books and lectures demonstrate, a very strong theorist, both independent of any school and profoundly knowledgeable about many: Freud, Lacan, the British school, American approaches to psychoanalysis, and aboriginal modes of healing; as well as philosophy, history, classics, sociology, and historical and modern literature. She integrates the collective wisdom and knowledge of these varied sources and disciplines, to develop and articulate, neither eclectically nor with orthodoxy, her unique theory of the psychoanalytic treatment of the mad. Thanks to her open and equality-based approach she demonstrates that the mad are capable of transference after all.

But she is much more than a high-level scholar and clinical practitioner. Two more features are relevant here. Her ongoing seminar “Madness and Society” at the *École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* in Paris, which she has been teaching for many years with Jean-Max Gaudillière, attracts a consistently large group of active participants, many also practicing in

Davoine's vein. Its popularity is due to the fact that, as a third element of her intellectual profile, she is also an extremely engaging teacher. This is partly related to the fact—a fourth of this author's traits—that she is also a born storyteller. Whether it is about “cases” or about events in her own life, about History or about small events, Davoine's stories are moving, as riveting and as suspenseful as a first-rate murder mystery. Murder is, incidentally, frequently part of her stories; she is deeply invested in understanding and responding to the way violence generates madness.

This book exhibits all four of these traits. What's more, all four are indispensable to achieving the book's ambitious goal, which is to articulate a theory that takes psychoanalysis out of its orthodoxies and makes it what it was always meant to be: a truly *social* science. And it does so by way of dialogic feeling: argumentation, saying, demonstration, showing, and affective engagement. The result is a book comparable to no other. At once an explanation of a theoretical thesis and a development of a great number of documented case studies, a gripping story and a picture book, a learned treatise and a humorous tale, this book can be read in different ways and for different ends. In my own experience, it bears many re-readings. One look at the opening page says it all: theoretical, narrative, humorous, tragic; the beginning grips readers, whatever their intellectual interests.

The story is positioned in time: “All Saints' Day was hovering.” That makes “today,” the present of the story, the Day of the Dead. And indeed, the author has just learned that one of her patients has died. This death sets the story as well as the first-person narrator's crisis in motion. The narrator immediately begins her self-interrogation: “Was I a monster? Just before leaving home, I'd almost killed a clumsy insect—mechanically, without feeling—on the simple pretext it had no business being in my house.” Between the huge event of the death of a patient and the automatic gesture of killing—but only “almost”—an insect, Davoine establishes a similarity-in-difference that sets the tone for the entire book.

The encounter with that insect, not coincidentally that mythical *social* insect, a bee, opens a barrage of associations that lead in a variety of directions. We traverse psychoanalytic theory, sociology, personal reflection on the use or ab-use of professional behavior. We also go to classical Greek—for example, the meaning of “therapist” as “buddy,” a social function that, since the AIDS crisis, has gained in visibility. And all this is broached in a tone that meanders between playful and serious, while the profound and pertinent thoughts that announce the theoretical thrust of the book are

understandable, concrete, and affectively appealing for everyone. Erasmus' Folly is introduced—the source for the book's title—and the equality between the "I" and the bee prefigures the theoretical position of equality between patient and analyst that is the foundation of the theoretical and clinical approach to psychoanalysis. All this on the first page.

In this preface I can only touch upon a few elements of this rich book. Given my own intellectual and creative engagement with the book, which inspired me to make a film, I limit myself to its narrative and verbal images, hoping to show these are not simply frivolous. On the contrary, they are the building blocks of its complex but limpidly exposed intellectual, theoretical, and clinical point.

#### STORYBOOK

This intricate and integrative mode of writing makes it impossible to distinguish the many levels on which this book operates or, to use a more adequate term, performs. One of many possible summaries of the story goes like this. The narrator—let's call her Françoise, to distinguish her from Davoine the author—has just learned of the death by overdose of one of her psychotic patients. Discouraged, she enters a deep crisis. The story is the development of that crisis, although with Davoine's non-melodramatic mode of writing, this crisis is not an explicit topic as much as it is the motor of the narrative. She is tempted to abandon her job at the psychiatric hospital. While pondering this decision in the hospital's courtyard, she takes a book on the Middle Ages out of her bag.

Then, the enigmatic figure of Mother Folly appears—as if out of the book—as its embodied *interpretant*. And so the story begins to unfold. Mother Folly is depressed because the Fools do not obey her anymore. Their traditions have been destroyed. She sits down in silence, in melancholy. This depressed state turns Mother Folly into a patient of sorts. (In the film *A Long History of Madness* that Michelle Williams Gamaker and I made on the basis of this book, on which more below, this depression and its ending in political combat is shaped with a wink to iconography: she takes the pose of Dürer's famous engraving *Melencolia I*; when she recovers, she becomes, or performs, the Statue of Liberty.)

A discussion ensues from this encounter, in which a deadpan Françoise remains situated in the present without being astonished by the confrontation with another historical time, and responds as if discussing with colleagues or patients. Absolute equality is the basis of both narrative and

intellectual persuasion. It is this ability to remain her professional self while engaging with other times and their discourses that is her primary strength, as a writer, as an analyst—and, as it happens, also as an actress.

Throughout the story an ontological uncertainty about madness reigns between *enactment*, *being*, and *being-perceived*. Since playing the fool is the Fool's profession, this quest takes a specifically theatrical form. Parallel to the confrontation between the psychoanalyst and her severely traumatized ("mad") patients, this encounter enacts a second confrontation with which the first is intertwined. This first encounter sets the contemporary world up against medieval fools, agents and performers of late-medieval political theater. That this is theater, and political to boot, is crucial for the serious function of the fools in the book. Most of the time, these two worlds mingle. That is a major point of the book, a philosophy of time interwoven with a philosophy of the permeability of "madness" and "sanity." This creates a risk of anarchy but also an opportunity to mitigate the frontier that casts the mad as a different species, outside of our social view. The ontological uncertainty of madness runs through the entire story and is, indeed, a major theoretical point the book makes. The intermediate spaces of the courtyard and the treatment room in the hospital, the corridors and the analyst's office, contribute narratively to these ambiguities.

The inextricable intertwining of theoretical and narrative articulation becomes visible, and thus demonstrates the way the literary and scholarly modes of writing strengthen each other. The medium of space, performative as it is, shapes each appearance differently. In this way, the ontology of personhood embedded in the idea of madness is questioned. 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 is in tune with the book's theoretical thrust.

In the case of the narrator, 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. The autobiographical slant of the narrative becomes multi-layered, and is not in the least hampered by the evidently fictional elements.

Two patients from the past stroll through Françoise's world when she least expects it, like specters. These are Sissi—Davoine's first failure of

twenty years ago—and the timeless elfin Ariste (Aristaeus), who dies at the beginning only to resurface regularly throughout the book when she evokes his hovering presence as an “inspector” (or as Françoise’s bruised super-ego), as a source of gossip, and as a memory. These two phantom patients constantly confront Françoise with the difficulty of her work and the danger, indeed likelihood, of failure. Ariste becomes Françoise’s *specter*, in the combined philosophical and sociological-political sense Derrida has put forward; his death a sacrifice to earn insight into the importance of identification; a kind of gift.

The issue of transference is key to Davoine’s theoretical disagreement with Freud, and her insistence that analysis can help the mad to heal. She converses with the historical scientist Schrödinger as if they had been long-term friends. The dialogic form, so appropriate for philosophizing, not only borrowed from Socrates but also from her own earlier book *Wittgenstein’s Folly* (published in English in 2009), is eminently suitable for the staging of opinions and doubts, moments of hope and of despair, illusion and discouragement, reasoning and passion.

Françoise gains a capacity to practice immersion in the deliriums of her patients, in order to become a fraternal equal to them. Only through such an “extreme identification” (my term, not hers) will she be able to carve for them a space in between wherein the “catastrophic regions” already evoked on the opening page, and which 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.”

Nodding to the rules of classical tragedy, all this action is set in a single day. Between the trial and the Carnival, Françoise’s day is not over. She goes on to treat Herlat, a homeless patient who turns up at her doorstep when she returns from the trial-like encounter with the Fools. After that, she pays an overdue visit to the grave of her former teacher, the sister of her father’s Resistance friend, Monsieur Louis, as well as to that of the latter’s “mad aunt” who also haunts Françoise’s childhood memories. Temporal turbulence reigns in this book as strongly as spatial swirling.

Theoretical considerations, which initially occur only in the mind of the narrator, will be taken over and continued, alternately initiated, by Fools, colleagues, or patients. Case histories, sometimes elliptical but always both clear and based on actual session notes, provide these considerations with an empirical basis, while the patients becomes theorists or “buddies” of the theorist. The book thus produces *theory*: a theory of mad-

ness 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; of space as a medium that facilitates sociality. And last but not least, of theory itself as (the product of) a collective process.

Davoine's entire project is a battle against the individualism that keeps the Mad impermeable to psychoanalysis and cuts them off from society. *Mother Folly* depicts her own 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. Through the intensely engaging writing, the book persuades readers both intellectually and affectively. It is, as I indicated above, strongly performative.

It is widely known that the concept of performativity has been taken up in philosophy and cultural studies, primarily under the influence of Judith Butler. Butler emphasizes that it is not the exceptional speech act but routine, reiterated speech acts that determine who one is. Treating people consistently as "mad"—refusing to take them seriously, responding to their mad utterances with disbelief, instead of using the opportunity fiction provides in exemplary manner to ask "What if . . . ?"—actually contributes to madness. But the habits of reiteration are also open to (slow) change. Through inhabiting a routine, one can change it from within. Narrative is eminently suitable to shape such subtle and dynamic transformations. And reading a narrative can be an exciting process of getting to know alternative possibilities. There lies its social relevance; its performativity.

#### PICTURE BOOK

This performativity is also significant for images, including images that, according to our ontological distinctions, do not materially exist. Davoine's book is also strongly visual. This has had enormous consequences for me as a cultural theorist, critic, and filmmaker with a keen interest in visual culture.

When I first read this book, for "purely academic" reasons—at the time, I was writing a book on a video artist who stages war trauma—I was astounded by its visuality. While I was reading, images whirled through my head. I could never detach those images from the theory and the narrative. But they were images—as in dreams. At that time, my colleague Michelle Williams Gamaker and I were looking for inspiration for our first fiction film. Thus far, we had made social documentaries, and we felt compelled to

turn a page and try our hand at fiction while maintaining our commitment to the social side of things. That it became this book—for all intents and purposes a rather academic book, after all—that formed the basis of our film was the last thing I would have expected. And yet, it was a perfect match. How this happened demonstrates the power of visuality in writing. One of *Mother Folly's* strengths is that it is a picture book as much as a storybook: you *see* what you read. Not coincidentally, “seeing” is a long-standing metaphor for understanding. In addition to affect, perception contributes to knowledge, and the etymology of “theory” leads back to “seeing through.” As one of the innumerable fringe benefits of reading this book, I learned more about how this seeing and/as knowing, and this understanding and/as affect, operate from it than from any of the academic word-image studies I have read.

First, an author wrote a book in which she described images that came out of her own readings. Second, my colleague Michelle and I read that book, and images—the same ones? different ones?—arose from our reading of Françoise’s readings. Except for the image on this book’s cover, a detail from Pieter Breughel the Elder’s painting *Dulle Griet (Mad Meg, 1562)*, which represent women driven mad by war, there were no images in the material sense involved in the book. The cover image gelled with the epigraph from Musil—“War is born, like crime, from the little incivilities that unthinking men enact every day”—also about war but on the micro level, the bee’s level, so to speak, to form a word-image hypothesis: this book is about war, its madness, and the madness it generates, and we will see what that looks like; it is about the routine, the small things, from which war and subsequent madness emerge. Unthinkingly, every day.

The book itself contains no visual illustrations. Nor does it need them. For these written images were so strong that after seeing them with my mind’s eye, I had to make them, not as or “after-images,” although chronologically they came later, but as “inter-images” that were *interpretants* of the images evoked but not presented.

To explain how this book achieves its exceptional effectiveness as, among other things, a book of theory, I use the term *interpretant* in the sense in which American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce theorized the sign: thus images can be signs even if they are not materially extant. Peirce begins 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. In this way, interpretation is both on-going and social.

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. Reflecting “from within,” in my case as filmmaker, on how these processes work is itself an activity steeped in a larger cultural context.

A good example of this interpretive process that allows collective theorizing to happen is the figure who gives this book its title. The figure of Folly emerges from a historical tradition, but traditions are never “pure” and homogeneous. Ours has at least three genealogies.

1. She is the leader of the late-medieval political theater the French call *sotties*, an anachronistic interpretation of which appears in the book. The story is actually structured quite precisely like a *sottie*. That theater frequently took the form of a mock trial, in which political abuse was exposed and tyrants undressed at the end, so that their true colors, the yellow and green of folly, became visible. This figure becomes the title character of the book; readers see her throughout.
2. She is inspired, secondly, by the speaker of Desiderius Erasmus’ *In Praise of Folly*, a text in which the personification of Folly speaks in the first person, as announced in Erasmus’ text: “An oration, of feigned matter, spoken by Folly in her own person.” This aspect of the figure is already mentioned on the book’s opening page. Readers hear this voice throughout.
3. When she has been driven mad by the violence of war, the figure shows up as Brueghel’s Dulle Griet/Mad Meg. This incarnation of the figure is on the cover of the French edition of the book. The theme of war this Brueghel figure embodies is insidiously present across the entire book.

Between words and images, the formation of *interpretants* can be seen as a version of intertextuality. The invocation of Erasmus’ Folly thus brings in more than the citation alone. We are sensitized to the importance of her

voice and address, by words like these, again from the beginning of Erasmus' text:

But if you ask me why I appear before you in this strange dress, be pleased to lend me your ears, and I'll tell you; not those ears, I mean, you carry to church, but abroad with you, such as you are wont to prick up to jugglers, fools, and buffoons.\*

Like Davoine, Erasmus masterfully introduces the main issues with his opening words. Contrasting "church" with going "abroad," meaning the opening of oneself up to the unknown, the strange, the mad, is the most productive way of learning from Folly. Incidentally, it is also about hearing, address, and listening as the essence of sociality. This suits the audiovisual medium of video perfectly.

Following the book, not to the letter (church) but to the spirit (abroad), our film, *A Long History of Madness* (or in French, *Histoires de fous*), stages a praise of Folly through a praise of anachronism. The two, it appears, go together in their attempts to break through the boundaries of a narrow, and constantly narrowed, genealogical, evolutionist "reason," and instead appeal to openness, to what grammar calls the "second person," while searching for wisdom and knowledge in unorthodox ways. Many of the choices made for an audio-visualization of a book, especially a theoretical one, are necessarily "deviations" or "betrayals." But from making this film, we learned what really matters in *Mother Folly*, namely, not to be literal with regard to loyalty (church) but to be bold and inventive (abroad), like this extraordinary book itself.

From conception, to script, to actual filming and editing, we made *Histoire de fous* (A Long History of Madness) 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 complexity is compounded by the fact that the author plays herself. But only *after* the images had circulated, and we had transformed them, did they come back to the author—from the outside, so to speak—who, in playing her role, transformed them again. This is why the film images can only be "*inter-images*," with several temporal and visual layers separating the "original" from the images in the film. This process of collective work has a dynamic that fits the theory Davoine puts forth here.

\* Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. John Wilson (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008), 9–10.

## A SENSE OF AN ENDING

All this is also in line with a specific conception of the fundamental intertemporality of images, which makes “ending” impossible. Even a material painting has once existed in the artist’s mind, before it was realized on canvas as something quite different. And that material painting subsequently keeps changing in each act of viewing projected upon it, with the time, place, and social circumstance of its subsequent “life” as a work of art. To that, there can be no ending.

For an image, in this sense, will always be in the process of “becoming.” The mad people Davoine calls upon in this book know this. They deploy forms that are never definitive but always coherent with the compulsion to *show what cannot be said*—to make visible what the silence imposed on them—denial, forgetting, taboo—has made inexpressible. But in their wisdom, the mad know this silence cannot “disappear it”—to render this verb active-objective and release it from its more usual fatalism. They make images that, unendingly, *move*; this was yet another reason why this book lent itself to a moving-image medium.

Both Davoine as author and Françoise as character have learned this survival of the past from their mad companions, to whom she/they serve(s) as *therapôn*, buddy, dialogic double—and vice versa. To show is ultimately the mission of the book, and thus the mission the book assigns to the film: to show, audiovisually, the transformable realities in which the past can recuperate its place—that place it had refused to give up anyway. For example, in the film, when Sissi, Françoise’s first patient who interrupted her treatment, appears and behaves regally, this is not simply a mad arrogation of movie-star allure inspired by her namesake made glamorous by Romy Schneider in *Mayerling*. Instead, she reclaims the dignity that had been taken from her. Visualizing this self-dignification by means of stylish costumes and hairdo was our way of enabling this allegedly mad person to become a source of unexpected wisdom to which her elegance and beauty constituted a form of access, while still showing her wounds in the form of facial expression and mode of speaking. Thus the character and her interlocutor, the analyst, become each other’s doubles, a doubling that in turn enabled a restoration of the broken social connection. This then is healing as becoming whole again. It requires a reversal of time, so that the past can participate in the present. The sense of an ending, as a result, consists not of an end but of a change in feeling; a lightness of being against the heaviness of the social rejection that preceded.

Each new phase of such becoming-lighter is informed by a later moment that retrospectively glosses an earlier one. That becoming, and the mad reversal of time that makes it possible, also holds for the collective work of author and subjects, filmmakers and actors—the work consisting of multiple images, the body of images called “*Mère folle*,” inflected by what “my work,” as a reader, filmmaker, and critic of the resulting images, adds to and changes in that corpus on the basis of what was already there but needed showing. Obviously, this book with its many allusions and quotations, its staged encounters between antiquity, the Middle Ages, the twentieth century, and a dozen disciplines, poses a great challenge for translation. Judith G. Miller did a masterful job, turning its literary qualities into genuine American literature, just as visual as the original.

Showing is also what scholarly writing and fiction have in common. I have mentioned that Davoine’s book hovers between fiction and theory. I consider it a “theoretical fiction,” the term Freud uses frequently, for example, to explain the genre of *Totem and Taboo*, his 1913 story of the primitive band of revolting sons killing and eating the tyrannical father. Sometimes, Freud’s story intimates, it takes fiction or other forms of imaginative thought to understand something for which reason is too simple. Like Freud, Davoine has theoretical points to make and uses speculation and fiction to develop, articulate, and make them. But unlike Freud’s primary tool of *plot*, Davoine’s points are primarily made through *images*. The plot itself serves rather to *frame* the images. In this way, looking back at my first reading of it, it seems to me that the book already harbored a film; indeed, asked for one.

Ending this preface, then, is the hardest part, because there is no ending. Davoine does not like to use the word “cure,” and even less “cured,” to denote a finite state. To do so would entail belief in a strong boundary between “mad” and “sane” people. She does not believe in such a boundary. On the contrary, it is the facile but false assumption of such a distinction that continues to isolate the mad. By refusing to acknowledge the responsibility of society—a society that condones rape, abuse, and war—for the continuous generation of trauma and its aftermath, “we” the collective that stigmatizes madness make it impossible for the mad to be, and feel, acknowledged as “one of us.” Their stories must be believed, even if distorted by the thick layers of pastness that constitute their madness, confusing generations and subjects. We must co-inhabit their “catastrophe zones” as Davoine calls them, open them up for cohabitation and also

for exit. If there is an end to madness, it is not as cured but as socially integrated. "Healing," rather, is what can take place. No end but a partial transformation.

In this preface, as in all publications about this book and its cinematic partner that I have written thus far, I have consistently spoken of "madness" and "the mad." This is due to another refusal of boundaries in Davoine's conception. A great impulse of the book is a polemic against pharmaceutical treatments, which tend to be based on the wisdom of the widely consulted American *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, currently in its fifth edition. On the basis of its classifications, patients are frequently diagnosed, which boxes them in into a specific kind of illness. This diagnosis comes with a prognosis, which is in turn pursued by means of pharmaceutical medication. In protest against this "fixating" mode of dealing with mental disorders, and heeding the preferences of patients themselves, we prefer to use the ludicrous but nicely vague and ambiguous term "madness" to anything that reeks of classification. Out of the box, as they say.

Moreover, in English, as the title of this book indicates, there was a choice to make. The French "*folle*" covers both madness and folly. English does not allow this ambiguity. Too bad; I'd have liked the sense of "angry" in "mad" to remain present. The choice of "folly," which resonates with Erasmus' text but also with the tradition of the *sottie* and such festive variations as Carnival, wrenches the word and the event, the people and the tradition, out of any classificatory isolation, and makes the turbulence Davoine has staged the subject of the book. In that turbulence, the reader is called upon to participate. He or she is asked to listen, and instead of questioning, to go with the flow towards an adventure that makes the best of what "social" means: the tendency of groups and persons to develop links and live in communities and to form transient but vital groups, living together in becoming, in cheerful not fearful difference.