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The mad rhetoric: Toward a rigor on radical creativity and its function in consciousness as a communicative principle

Eugene David Hetzel

THE MAD RHETORIC: TOWARD A RIGOR ON RADICAL

CREATIVITY AND ITS FUNCTION IN CONCIOUSNESS

AS A COMMUNICATIVE PRINCIPLE

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A Thesis

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by

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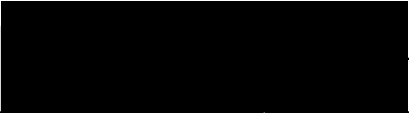Presented to the

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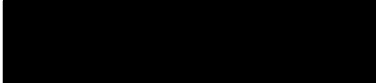California State University,

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a theory of "mad rhetoric" and
the role "radical creativity" plays in the construction of
mad rhetorics by "mad rhetors." This thesis explains the
root process through which the mad rhetor takes a unique
germ of an idea in their own psyches, or a *chora,* and
transforms or "maddens" them into radically creative ideas
and concepts. In turn, this thesis explains how the mad
rhetor "wraps" their radical creativity into a form that
belongs to a known creative genre or technical tradition
that others can appreciate. This thesis then explains the
qualities of mad rhetorics, as well as the roles mad
rhetors and their mad rhetorics play in society.

This thesis also works to contradict a misconception
within the literature that links mental illness with
creativity. By offering mad rhetorical theory as an
alternative method to assess mad rhetorics with, I suggest
a model that stresses qualities inherent within the mad
rhetoric that are demonstrative of the influence of the mad
rhetor's radical creativity.

This thesis also explores three separate creative
works as examples of different forms of mad rhetorics as a
way in which to demonstrate the application of this theory

using established critical frameworks. These texts include:
the short story "The Music of Erich Zann" by H.P.
Lovecraft; the film *Eraserhead* by David Lynch; and the
Self-Portrait (blue), September 1889 by Vincent Van Gogh.
This thesis then concludes with a discussion of further
possibilities for research using this theory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Myrna Hetzel and Mary Reuter, two wise women that always believed in me.

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CHAPTER ONE

ON RADICAL CREATIVITY AND THE ORIGIN OF MAD

RHETORIC IN HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Radical Creativity: The Core Unit of Mad Rhetoric

The social world is a stage of ideas and acts of

creativity, and nearly all of these processes fit into a

continuum of production and the denial of production.

Nearly all of what is produced along the way is either a

reproduction of previous forms or a product that bears some

mark of change and innovation, Occasionally, however, a

creation is produced that bears the mark of a rarified and

uniquely original revision of a form, This new product

bears the characteristics of previous creations, but it

also breaks with them by including a creative element

unique to that particular creation and its creator. This

echelon of production is what I have chosen to term the

"mad rhetoric," which I mean to represent the function,

form, and processing of radical creativity. It is my

intention to demonstrate in this thesis that the production

of these radically creative mad rhetorics and artifacts by

mad rhetors marks one of the quintessential ways in which

artistic genres and technical fields grow. The fundamental

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function through which this growth is achieved is through
the reshaping of a generally recognizable form by an
individual into a precedential construction. The
construction incorporates a radically subjective concept
without toppling the fundamental structure of the original
form. By understanding how this unique communicative
process has been achieved, which we could do through the
examination of mad rhetorics, we can attempt to comprehend
patterns through which creators advance the various
traditions of creative production.

Mad Rhetoric as a Rhetorical Model

The main thesis of this work is that, to be radically
creative is therefore to be fundamentally a communicator,
because radical rhetors attempt to meld their supra-
original ideas into forms understandable by others. All
communication is a matter of interplay between the psyche
and the social world: therefore an act of mad rhetorical
address involves making a composite of the mad rhetor's
radically creative idea with previously recognized
constructs. I submit that, by understanding the mad
rhetor's strategies by interpreting instances of mad
rhetorics, this research seeks to identify and better

understand great watershed moments when mad rhetorics expand creative genres. Put differently, mad rhetorics are the texts and acts that incite the evolution of creative traditions. By understanding the role communication plays in the production and reception of mad rhetorics, it is also feasible that we can begin to further appreciate the role creativity plays in social interaction. We can appreciate how one mad rhetor's campaign to share a radically creative idea can inspire other future mad rhetors seeking to ascertain the appropriate skein with which to weave their ideas into contemporary forms.

To further explicate the core unit of a mad rhetoric with a concrete example, we can continue with the analogy of the "normal" form of a building, such as a hotel, and show how such a construction can become totally reformulated into the form of a mad rhetoric, as it was in the ICEHOTEL JUKKASJÄRVI. At the time of its construction (Spring 1990), the ICEHOTEL was the world's first semi-permanent large scale public structure cut from compacted ice and snow (ICEHOTEL AB, 2006). While many have since copied its format (the fate of many popular works of creation), the building at the time of its erection was a unique expression of architectural engineering. It was

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actually an expansion built on top of the designs of an exhibition hall created by French artist Jannot Derid, himself the designer of that expansion. While itself a viable construction, the ICEHOTEL pushed the concept of shelter to such an extreme as to make the form grow. In its execution and in its formulation, Derid transformed a radical concept that he alone believed viable (although he did receive official permits to produce it), which was, critically, unprecedented, and built it using formulae and materials he could obtain. This is the essence of the mad rhetorical act: taking the thought and the inspiration on the edge of ultimate subjectivity, and realizing it in a way that has substance and that can be recognized by others. This recognition of individual precedence is what makes the mad rhetoric not an act of personal notation but a matter of human communication, and it is here at the level of the completed form that we can examine and criticize the act itself.

Mad rhetorical acts defy generalizations about their specific character because mad rhetorics by their nature are revolutionary acts of creativity within the bounds of the field from which their root forms originate. In creating mad rhetorical acts, mad rhetors take the root

form of a particular modality of communication as it is commonly understood at the time of their creation and reshape that root form to include an element of creative expression that is unique to that particular mad rhetor. This mad rhetoric is then reissued into the field of communication as a precedential construct fit to be understood and appreciated by others familiar with that field of communication. Thus a mad rhetoric is a artifact or act that breaks the conventions of a particular field at the time of its creation in a radical way while it simultaneously remains a part of the creative field to which it owes its general fabric.

Toward the Establishment of a Theory of Mad Rhetoric

It is my intention to demonstrate here how one can classify qualities of the radically creative act and the virtues of the mad rhetor through the examination of various rhetorical texts, artifacts or acts for the presence of radical creativity. I will use a trio of different critical examples to demonstrate different ways in which a mad rhetorical act can be communicated. In so doing, I hope to also demonstrate the value of a mad

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rhetoric analytical framework to the advancement of the critical fields of textual analysis, performance analysis, visual image analysis, and film analysis within the study of rhetorical communication.

It is also my intention for this work to contribute to the clarification of long-held contradictions within the literature regarding the ways in which radical creativity has been confused with mental illness. In the creation of what I now term mad rhetorics, I argue in the literature review that mental illness is not a prerequisite. I offer the mad rhetorical act as a way to understand and critique creativity that deviates radically from previous definitions. I also posit that the mad rhetor's text should be the primary source of authentic analysis, along with an integrated, secondary recounting of the worldly contextual conditions that might have affected the author's production of the work, including their own insights about their work. Finally, when appropriate to the material, I believe the addition of critical commentary and reception analyses offer strong proof of a mad rhetoric's social and historical presence.

In my exploration of the literature, I will be focusing my analysis on the work of scholars who offer

poignant commentaries on facets of what I now name the mad rhetoric. First, I will be exploring the nature of creative impulse followed by a classification of what separates radical creativity from other forms of creativity. I will then relate how previous scholarship has linked mental illness or madness with what I term radical creativity and why I believe that connection to be a false conclusion. I will discuss how this misclassification has lead many mad rhetors into situations of unnecessary personal strife. I will give the reasons why a text should serve as the primary avenue for the analysis of mad rhetorics and what role historical information surrounding a mad rhetoric plays in helping scholars properly analyze it and understand its import. I will discuss the motivations mad rhetors deal with in creating and disseminating their mad rhetorics, the nature of the mad rhetorical state of creativity, and why some mad rhetors may choose to stifle their work. I will define the nature of radical creativity itself, what inspires it, and how mad rhetors transform their radically creative ideas into mad rhetorics. I will discuss the role mad rhetorics and the mad rhetors that produce them play in society. I will then finish my literature review by listing the different ways in which

aspects of mad rhetorical theory are demonstrated in the creative world.

CHAPTER TWO

RECTIFYING AN AGELESS SUPPOSITION: MAD RHETORIC

AND THE LITERATURE

Radical Creativity as a Function
of Human Consciousness

To understand the conceptualization behind how I

utilize the term "radical creativity," one must first

understand how this definition of radically creative

actions diverges from those in the a priori, also divergent

tracts already written about human creative design (Conley,

1984). There are many ways in which to classify the concept

of "creativity," for it is something that transverses the

many corners of progressive human experience. There are

also many ways to study the creative impulse and its

execution, from the realms of the technical to the borders

of the most abstract, but what I have chosen to focus on in

my examination of this subject's grandeur is literature

about how intuitive thoughts develop into acts of creation:

that is, how creativity moves out of the human creator's

psyche and life experiences and is then transferred into

the field of natural existence. Therefore, I begin with the

scholarship of Henri Bergson (1946, 1907/1998), who chose

to frame creativity in the context of the psyche's intuitive flow of concepts about personal experience, the stream of consciousness that our active and subconscious mental apparatus appropriates in the process of making the perceived possible. Creative impulses flow from that source when we plan and construct innovative artificial and social forms.

If we understand this, that all of creativity is smelting these resulting abstractions into evolutionary acts of creation, then radical creativity is the taking of ideas that exist outside of most murky flows of common experience and that are unique to individuals, and the molding of these ideas into new forms that others can comprehend and appreciate. That initial contact with the idea as it incubates in the individual's psyche, and the subsequent reinterpreting of it into a schema that the rhetor uses to execute a work of creativity that the masses can recognize, is the process I term the mechanics of "maddening." This maddening of a radically subjective idea into concepts that others can understand and appreciate is what I term the "mad rhetorical process" that marks creative individuals "mad rhetors," their overall works

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"mad rhetorics," and the radically creative aspects of their works also "mad rhetorics."

With these definitions in place, I expand my exploration of the creative impulse as a principle component of communication through a thorough research of the work of scholars in the field of communication studies and other tangential disciplines. While Bergson offers a strong base from which to expand research on this complex subject, the field of scholarship on the topic has been significantly advanced in the years following his theorizing by scholars. Situationalist philosopher Raoul Vanigem believed that creative endeavors ultimately allowed for an escape from the banal into the realm of the subjective where the commonplace could be infused with the desires of the individual (1994). Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997) conceives of creativity as a function of what he calls "flow," a highly focused state where the individual creator is at one with their subject, shaping their materials into a vision that is accordance to their vision by way of their personal ability. Interestingly, Csikszentmihalyi sees this process as one that is matched to the specific task at hand, where the creator is "in the moment" enough to be perfectly tasked to

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their creative process to the point of oneness with it. Mad

rhetors experience exactly this kind of connection with

their subject matter as they transform their radical

creativity into a mad rhetoric, although Csikszentmihalyi's

analysis of the creative process includes many more

creative situations in its blanket assessment of the

creative process than the specific situation I am exploring

here.

The scholarship of Julia Kristeva (2002) dictates some

of the most complex ideas regarding the process of

creativity in all of the literature. In engaging one's

semiotic understanding of the world, the creative

individual is able to engage intertextual influences to

abject raw concepts into forms appreciable by others, Mad

rhetors, with their reliance on directly grafting a

Kristevian semiotic onto an intertextual form others can

grasp, are the most intimate of all creators in the cycle

she describes. She used the Greek word *chora* (2002, pp. 36)

to describe the free-floating idea-thing that exists in a

pre-linguistic state in the mind of the individual creator,

and I am suggesting that it is this intimate part of the

mad rhetor's mind that they abject in its transformation

into a radically creative form that is then surrounded with

a rhetorical form others can appreciate and enjoy. What sets the radically creative idea apart from other creative ideas, then, is that it is not immediately absorbed in the mind of the creator into a collage of other intertextual impulses that will then later become transformed into a element of a rhetoric, but is instead first maddened into a compatible form that will join in with the rest of those elements.

Views on creativity and the creative impulse vary among innovative creators themselves. The French playwright and absurdist Alfred Jarry (1980) considered a constant state of creative evolution in the individual and in art vital to the maintenance of a healthy creative tradition, comparing a lack of turbulence caused therein to lead only toward a "state of mummification." The surrealist painter Salvatore Dali (1993) was of the opinion that all creative work functioned as a necessary transformation of imitated subjects. The painter Vincent Van Gogh (1872-1890/2003) said his greatest satisfaction was to be found in the creation of artwork. In regards to radical creativity, however, avant-garde dramatist Antonin Artaud (1988) may offer the most poignant insight:

There is in every madman a misunderstood genius whose

idea, shining in his head, frightened people, and for

whom delirium was the only solution to the

strangulation that life had prepared for him.

It is the creative person who is able to resist such an

instinct and who is able to craft their radically creative

idea into a creation others can appreciate that becomes the

mad rhetor.

Mad Rhetoric, not Mentally Ill Rhetors

This work's primary purpose, as mentioned earlier, is

to isolate the act of radical creativity, although I would

like to discuss upfront some very distinct issues arising

within the creativity literature. Perhaps most important

among these issues is how I distinguish mad rhetorics and

mad rhetors from rhetors who suffer from mental illness.

Madness and creativity have been linked at least since the

times of Hellenic antiquity, and the philosophical

tradition from Plato (Ion; Thompson, 1969; Harpham, 1998)

onwards posits an ideological relationship between the two

as something that has fascinated the greatest minds of the

ages. Plato, in seeking to ascribe rampant creativity to

the tenets of a "divine madness," saw a connection between

a skewed view of the world and the completion of unique

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acts of creation, but his cultural and philosophical understanding of intellectual discovery limited him to his conclusions. He linked euphoric mental illness (what we would today classify as mania) and creativity, instead of recognizing that the real link of genius exists between a radically subjective creative identity and that person's conviction to communicate that unique vision to the world. This is not to suggest that the tenets of creativity should never be associated with the workings of pain within the human psyche (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Schneiderman, 1998), nor is it to suggest that the anguish of coping with mental illness and its effects on one's status in society is anything less than one of the most distinct and horrendous situations known to humanity (Lowenfeld, 1952; Rosen, 1968, Porter, 1987; Porter, 2002). Indeed, it is well established that the pain of mental illness can act as the wellspring from which many great creators have been able to draw inspiration. It is also well known that many of the greatest minds have indeed suffered from mental illness, as a variety of scholars such as the psychiatrist N.C. Andreasen (Andreasen & Powers. 1975; Andreasen, 1987), psychoanalyst Barry Panter (1995), and historian David Nettle (2001) have all pointed out. I would like to

suggest, however, that suffering from problems with mental health and being a mad rhetor are two different, distinct conditions (even though many times mad rhetors themselves suffer from mental illness). I also argue that harmful outcomes occur when they are believed to be one and the same by the public. Indeed, Michael Foucault in his work *Madness and Civilization* (1965) discusses in detail the detainment of the Antonin Artaud in a mental institution against his will for the "crime" of creating socially discordant and subversive material. Thus he notes the dangerous political and social ramifications of linking radically creative concepts explored by mad rhetors with incumbent mental health issues that society has deemed either treatable or needful of restraint. In short, by linking biological or psychological trauma to the intellectual pursuit and production of radically creative works, scholars and others do mad rhetors and their work an extreme and erroneous disservice. Even, if the scholar assumes the mad rhetor is mentally ill but worthy of inspection, as Lowenfield (1941) does, the scholar is still focusing their attention first on the state of mad rhetor's mental illness instead of their radical creativity. If the scholar plays the false role of the advocate of the

radically creative person who has been wrongly

institutionalized as a sufferer of mental illness, which is

what Foucault (1965) and Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

(1983) do, the scholar still shifts attention away from the

mad rhetoric that defines the radically creative brilliance

of the mad rhetor. In my mind, scholars attempting to link

mental illness and radical creativity pursue a superficial

way to define the mad rhetor. The tie is also an

irresolvable oxymoron. This is because of the limitations

of medical authorities' diagnoses (and most certainly they

diagnose as critics after the fact) which only allow them

to classify the individual's symptomatic "mind state" as

that which they can directly observe. A scholar who makes

reference to the mind state of a person by the way of their

acts of creation is potentially on a fool's errand of

inaccuracy. Furthermore, as literary critics Shoshana

Felman (1985) and Lillian Feder (1980) both point out, the

psychiatric link between mental illness and the mind of the

creator (or writer as they address it) is something that is

beyond the critic's capacity to access.

An Alternate Critical Path

What I suggest is that scholars who choose to analyze

works or acts of mad rhetorical design should endeavor to

identify the artifice inherent in the work's or act's construction, not in the rhetor's mind-state, for this is the artifice that attempts to use forms recognizable by others. Scholars should follow up that analysis with an examination of the tactics that the mad rhetor employs to break with others' recognized creative styles so as to add their own radically subjective input in ways that expand the creative act without betraying core patterns that others can appreciate. In isolating this key development in a work, scholars can understand how the creator's work diverges from or converges with others' forms, and also how such acts promote a new definition of how some creative productions emerge within their creative tradition. Ultimately, we can work to better understand how a single rhetor might alter the perception of that tradition for future generations and how one person might transform and transmit a radically subjective concept into a form appreciable by others. By analyzing the instances and the techniques used by various mad rhetors to communicate their mad rhetorics, a literature will grow from which rhetorical scholars may better gain an understanding the ways in which creators communicate original concepts. The rhetoric of innovation in rhetorical studies is still quite fertile

ground, and this theory offers one scholastic hub through which other scholarly traditions can be incorporated into the study of new rhetorical strategies.

The Mechanics of the Rhetor's Maddening of an Idea: A Matter of Conscious Will

To explicate further the concepts of "maddening" and the "maddening process," we must understand where within the psyche the general creative process originates. Humanity's urge to produce, to capture, and to harness ideas and materials as a way to gain ownership over their existence is the drive from which all innovation comes (Lowenfeld, 1952). Some scholars, such as Anti-Psychiatrist and mental health care critic R.D. Laing (1973, 1982), might choose to describe excursions into the creative impulse as attempts to understand the unexplained, and to argue that people's "deviant" interpretations are located within resulting works with touches of the psychologically original. Laing (1974) also suggests that such originality might cause most individuals' distress, because most naturally seek "ontological security" (which is Laing's term for the internalized need for social "normalcy"). Laing thus provides some general insight into why some mad

rhetors might choose particular forms with which to wrap their radically creative ideas. Certainly, this conceptualization of the creative impulse would not be alien to Giles Deleuze and his frequent writing partner Felix Guattari (1983, 1994), both of whom view the creative impulse to produce as a "desiring-engine" bent on offering unique products of intellectual origin onto the "body-with-organs" social world that hungers for novelty. However, these two scholars would almost certainly suggest that the adjunction of mad rhetorics onto forms others can understand is, in fact, a betrayal at some level of the radically creative ideas' deterritorialized nature. Because most ideas (including radically creative ones) retain the rhizomatic characteristics that allow them to assume multiple meanings beyond even those that have been assigned to them at any one particular time, these scholars would argue that forcibly affixing the gossamer nature of the highly original radically creative idea onto a formulaic and sedate creative form would be bastardizing its true worth to those who could appreciate it absolute novelty. Still, as Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals* (1886/1989) and his critics (Deleuze, 1983) have deftly pointed out, the will to produce, especially among those who struggle to

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be truly innovative, is an overriding desire that ultimately tempts the hearts, minds, and actions of many creators, including mad rhetors, into materially realizing and producing their dreamed objectives. To Nietzsche, the "sacrifice" of obtuse originality and the creative use of commonly understood social forms is worth the rewards to be had from creative accomplishment.

I differ ideologically from these scholars not so much on their ideas about creative inspiration as I do on their ideas regarding the production of creative works. It is my contention that in production mad rhetors neither completely submit to the security of preconceived notions nor do they forfeit the ontological strength of their radically creative idea. What they do is translate it into the particular language or form that they believe best fits its purpose, through rhetorical materials or methods that are available and familiar to them at the time. I think it is important to reiterate that in the lived world, all rhetors have available to them the psycho-social tools and materials that are also available to the mad rhetor. Mad rhetors are just as much products of their place and time as are other creative people. It is entirely possible for any creator of any artifact or any producer of any other

form of rhetoric to work their whole lives in their chosen

fields and be highly successful, and only issue one mad

rhetorical act or text as it occurs to them and as they are

motivated. It is hardly necessary or advisable to spend

constant effort to break free from the tethers of accepted

practice. The mad rhetor is often best able to express

their mad rhetorics if they are, in fact, masters of their

own school of expression and artifice. The mad rhetors, in

their parallax fashion of affixing their hyper-subjective,

precedential products or ideas onto forms that others can

consume within their capacities to understand and use, are

just as much engineers of the norm as they are trailblazers

of the apocryphal. Thus to suggest that they are completely

debilitated in social interactions by mental illness, and

that this illness defines an aspect of their character, is

to suggest that they are not capable of sanely and

effectively using the social material that is necessary for

others to comprehend their mad rhetoric.

Thus, the mechanics that set apart mad rhetorics from

other acts of previous creation are not so much a matter of

strictly new invention. Nor are these mechanics a function

of their adherence to the rules of construction already set

forth. Rather they interject their personal vision into

forms and ideas that others can readily appreciate. They provide that their personal vision takes their act of creation toward a new vector of uncharted representation. Some might question whether such a thing is possible; do reflexive restraints of human communicative processes prevent "anything new under the sun" from ever coming to pass (Bergson, 1946)? However, when scholars understand that original works of mad rhetoric are responsible for each expansion in social expression, then they can locate individual instances in the progression of human knowledge (Derrida, 1981; Deleuze, 1983; Guattari, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, Zizek, 1999). Each of us has original ideas in our minds all the time: the issue here is whether they are radical creative or not, and whether we are able to communicate these hyper-subjective radical concerns to others in terms and forms that they might understand so as to grasp that our insight is unique. I propose that, to be deemed radical, someone's psyche has to break down or "madden" a concept in such a way as to lead that concept into an entirely new direction of expression. An example of this kind of creative strategy can be found in the Italian exploitation film *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975) by Pier Paolo Pasolini, which turns the

premise of the arguably already mad rhetorical story *120 Days of Sodom* (1784) by the Marquis de Sade into a polemic against fascism, casting the mid-century Italian elite, already notorious for their social callousness, into the extreme roles of blatant serial abusers of human eroticism. By showing how the fascists enslaved the flesh of the unwilling and then eradicated the sensations of human affection from their raped victims merely to satiate their own state of sinister bourgeois banality, Pasolini was able to take the sordid (but comic) social commentaries of De Sade and madden those premises into his mad rhetoric about the annihilation of the human emotional condition of the Othered.

We can conceive of how mad rhetors expand the horizons of the discipline of rhetorical analysis by first understanding the mad rhetoric through the lens of socio-cognitive limitation, as both Foucault and Bruner (2002) describe the process of social digestion of deviant ideas, and then through a discussion of cultural adoption. Radical thoughts that fail to be mad rhetorics are assumed to be all of the minutia that rhetors fail to frame in understandable ways. I suggest that one of the greatest misunderstandings of previous scholarship on creativity has

been not realizing that those suffering mental illnesses

and many of the rest of us keep radically creative ideas

locked within hyper-subjective worlds. The completely

mentally ill, with their severely distorted understanding

of reality, especially cannot be appreciably understood by

others. True bouts of mental illness in fact hinder, not

open up, intellectual subjectivity to some ethereal font of

prophetic inspiration, despite how Plato might see the

"role" of madness. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari, in their

seminal tract *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

(1983), point out that those suffering from true forms of

mental illness run a stronger chance of finding themselves

too crippled to construct a work as inherently demanding

and complex as a mad rhetoric. The sheer strain of this

penultimate level of creative artifice would be too much

for those who lack intellectual continuity, for their

disability inhibits the spring from which the mad rhetor

finds the mechanics of inspiration (although even the

mentally ill might certainly suggest that the experience of

their pain could be reshaped into desiring-productions of

creation). Taking a different tack, scholar S.A. Diamond

(1999) examines the role that psychological and physical

pain plays in the shaping of artists and their work. He

demonstrates how this dichotomy of emotional repression and expression can both hinder the artist's hand and serve as its motivation. By personifying this function as "the daimon," Diamond suggests that a superhuman impulse personifies the spirit of a creative rhetor's subjectivity and that it is not merely a choice to internalize and their self-incriminate as "deviant." Shoshana Felman, in *Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis* (1985), points out that while society's power relations certainly affect the ways in which others receive and distribute texts, a text's inherent fluctuating state of readability dictates its interpretation by its readers. Texts must remain faithful to the patterns of their own established logic, and readers reject many texts primarily because they induce in them a crisis of complexity that bewilders them. Their complexity places them beyond the consumer's taste or reasoning power. This creative limitation certainly aggravates the task of the mad rhetor who proposes radically new expansions to a genre of creative work. They must endure a constant struggle in their work to remain faithful to their unique and complicating vision but not to trespass into a realm of arcane obscurity. This mad rhetor's cyclopean task, Felman suggests, requires a singularity of resolve and purpose

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that would be outside of the capability of the profoundly

mentally incapacitated. By classifying and criticizing

these extraordinary works as mad rhetorics, I cast aside

previous crass critical frameworks that would seek to

defame them as "the works of mad genius," or some such,

instead of calling them what they are: the works of

radically innovative creators.

Another important understanding to reach regarding

radical creativity and its output is that neither

constitutes a person's permanent label. The mad rhetorical

condition that produces radically creative works

temporarily captures a person's identity as a mad rhetor.

The mad rhetorical creative cycle marks a period of that

person's life, a period that ceases to classify that person

as a mad rhetor when they complete their mad rhetoric.

While certain outstanding people may experience more then

one radically creative episode in their lives, they always

experience them as periods. Hence mad rhetors are naturally

made and unmade, never born or diagnosed. Therefore, from

the critical standpoint, the mad rhetorical act and the mad

rhetorical state are bound up into sets that can be

analyzed through their resulting finite, explicit texts. In

this way, we need not bother ourselves with the internal

measures of the creator's personal character (Frentz, 1993), for like all rhetorical critical theory, mad rhetorical theory only works with what is demonstrated and communicated that labels the rhetor as a mad rhetor.

While I am coining the terms "mad rhetor," "maddening," and "mad rhetorics" in this work, many scholars have studied the genius of these rhetorics over the ages; they have examined the works of creative individuals which would fall under my definition. Nietzsche (1886/1989) would certainly lump the mad rhetor into his meta-definition of the übermench as someone who rises above the cultural and intellectual expectations of production to create and think at a proto-creative level. While his understanding of the principles of "higher level" thinking encompasses concepts that aren't germane to my argument, his texts find a place for the idea of radical subjectivity. One need look no farther then his conceptualization of Zarathustra (1887/1978) than to see the fate of a man on a mad rhetorical quest to communicate his radically creative conceptualization of a universe with a unique understanding of humanity's place in it and of the spiritual roles of moralistic governance. Zarathustra, much like Nietzsche himself, bucked tradition, a key quality of

the mad rhetor and mad rhetorics. Mad rhetors incorporate

ideas and perform acts of radically creative discordance

that challenge the logic prevalent in their time through

what Claude Levi-Strauss (1952) would say constitutes the

mad rhetor's return to an evolutionary unchained "savage

mental state" that conceptualizes ideas from a pre-

discursive sensual understanding of them. Mad rhetors tap

into and exploit an idea that Lyotard (1973) argues is a

decoupage of various sublime micro-narratives, making them

agents that intellectually affront. These ideas puncture

the falsely conscious illusions that Zizek (2006) suggests

exist within the gap in the parallax between the material

and the ideal. They demand that convenient, but false,

understandings stand aside for a more visceral creative

vision.

When mad rhetors breach these illusions, which can

become institutionalized into the social order, controversy

can ensue. This controversy may cast the mad rhetor into

predicaments where they might be considered a rebel, a

subversive or worse. They may be seen as a challenge to

power structures and regulators who have the capacity to

adversely affect, even ruin, the radical creator's

socioeconomic and political status (Strauss, 1952; Read,

1967; Hampden-Turner, 1971; Thorn, 1996; Vaneigem, 2001). The mad rhetor's contribution may go unrecognized in the popular media, or may be blacklisted into obscurity: both of which are disasters for creative individuals seeking financial and social currency for their work (Foucault, 1965; Hampden-Turner, 1971; Deleuze, 1983; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Debord, 1995). Indeed, perhaps one of the most dynamic reasons why critics have downplayed mad rhetors and mad rhetorics is because popular or elite opinion has discounted them, regardless of their actual construction and merit (Nietzsche. 1886; Foucault, 1965; Hampden-Turner, 1971; Laing, 1973; Deleuze & Guattari. 1983). This kind of social tyranny is certainly not limited to acts of mad rhetoric; however, the very nature of the deviance inherent in the production of their mad rhetorics may make mad rhetors that reluctant to express them for fear of condemnation (Foucault, 1965; Laing, 1973; Deleuze & Guattari. 1983). When one sees that one's work bears a significant risk of bringing one imprisonment, banishment, shunning or committal to mental health facilities, one certainly might be hesitant to attempt something that would break the tyranny of the status quo (Foucault, 1965; Guattari, 1972; Laing, 1973; Deleuze, 1993; Deleuze &

Guattari, 1993; Debord, 1995). One need look no farther

than such men and women with mad rhetorical verve as

Virginia Woolf, Antonin Artaud or Vincent Van Gogh than to

realize the possible consequences of taking one's art

toward extremes deemed unacceptable, or perhaps unusable,

by authorities hot in pursuit of shifting someone or

someone's work behind locked doors (Nietzsche. 1886;

Foucault, 1965; Scheff, 1975; Lynch, 1983; Porter, 1987;

Nettle. 2001; Porter, 2002).

Still, there are many reasons why a mad rhetor might

continue with their work. The chance for fame is certainly

a relevant goal, as is the possibility of financial reward.

Beyond such tangible benefits, however, many mad rhetors

probably continue their work because of the pressures of

existential idealism. Just as many may also experience a

sense a stubborn visionary persistence that stands

determined to make "art for art's sake" in an effort to

make their mark in society and creative tradition. Still

others may even be looking to make a profound statement

regarding their lives and ideas. Virginia Woolf, an

incredibly gifted pioneer of the modernist style, was known

to suffer from what many have suggested posthumously was

bipolar disorder, yet it has been argued that she was

subjected on multiple occasions to her own "room with

yellow wallpaper" because she "dared" to advocate for the

role of women as intellectually-gifted writers, and because

she utilized lyrical stream-of-consciousness writing to

capture the thoughts of repressed "mad people" dealing with

the grinding banality of social hypocrisy (Bell, 1974).

Just as Woolf's used her bouts of depression were used as a

convenient excuse for her forced isolation, the loved ones

of Vincent Van Gogh's used his similar lapses into a

depressed state to institutionalize the troubled innovator

as "gone astray" (Callow, 1996). Antonin Artaud, as

Foucault (1965) and other scholars have detailed, also

suffered a similar fate, and while he certainly was the

victim of multiple, vicious drug habits, he did not, with

significant likelihood, suffer from natural bouts of mental

infirmity. That he was a radical and, undoubtedly, a

radically creative theatre and poetic persona, is well

noted. He was repeatedly incarcerated in mental health

asylums with these characteristics exposed as proof of his

deviancy by the authorities. As all three of these famous

cases point out, the risks of exposing one's one

revolutionary work can be run very high, so it is quite

understandable why untold potential mad rhetors have

withheld their work, or perhaps toned it down, so as to escape persecution, and it is here before the terrible gate of repression where the potential for real innovation dies.

Beyond the horrors of incarceration, it is quite feasible that many mad rhetors withhold their radical verve simply because they fear their creations might not be well-received and, thus, not circulated and read. Whether it be art, music, writing or theatre, the creative arts rarely prove profitable for those who heed their calling, so it behooves a creator to produce work that will sell (Strauss, 1952; Read, 1967; Simonton, 1999; Zizek, 1999). Thus, it is certainly logical that someone capable of producing mad rhetorics, especially for mass distribution, might feel somewhat blackmailed by the specter of poor sales numbers into expressing other ideas and projects (Strauss, 1952; Simonton, 1999; Spivak, 1999; Nicol. 2000). Thus, it is my suggestion that any critic, in an analysis of a mad rhetoric, recognizes the real risks a creator takes in producing a radically unique text that applies their chosen creative art. A critic should at least appreciate why any conservative strokes may exist therein; after all, the critical qualifier of a mad rhetoric is not merely the level to which it is avant-garde, but rather the level to

which it sews back radically subjective ideas into forms people can appreciate and consume. To put it simply: any act of creation has a political, textual, and economic relationship to its context, radical or no. So, while I am suggesting that critics of mad rhetorics should turn first to the text in their search for cultural value, I also argue it is important to consider the mad rhetor's surrounding biographical circumstances that have affected its creation.

Whenever researchers propose a new theory, inevitably they must justify why they believe it expands the literature. Toward that end, and also to support my arguments against linking mental health with radical creativity, I argue that creative actions are a matter of conscious work and will. While the roots of creativity exist insubstantially in our psyches as *chora* (Kristeva, 2002, pp.26), the root of radically creative mad rhetorical act or creation is the instance when creators madden a *chora*-cum-radical-creativity into the concrete form of a mad rhetoric. Radically creative individuals need not suffer from mental illness nor be geniuses in any way; they merely need be proficient enough in their chosen creative fields to be able to construct and transmute their vision

into a radical direction. The resulting construction must
be something others can appreciate in some way, although it
need not always be completely recognizable. For example,
some of the work by abstract expressionistic painter
Jackson Pollock defies formal recognition for many people,
but most of these same could probably identify it as a work
of art and recognize the radically creative flourish that
went into it. Nicholas Royle, in his book *Telepathy and
Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (1991), labels this
projection the "telepathic process," which he describes as
"an imbedding of the intent of the author onto their text,
using idea-shapes to translate concepts into a direct
dialogue between the author and their reader (92)." Barbara
Schapiro (1994) also frames this relationship under the
banner of previous work in the field of psychoanalytic
epistemology, suggesting that creative writers infuse their
writing with a face of their personality specific to their
work, a relational avenue with which they feel they can
best connect their concepts through writing to the reading
public. In this sense, a mad rhetor can be understood to be
utilizing a relational exchange as well, using the forms
that they frame their work with as an attempt to gain
recognition and understanding while simultaneously amending

that overall form with a radically subjective concept that exists outside of their consumer's familiarity.

The strongest course to understanding mad rhetorics is to criticize artifacts and performances that mad rhetors create. This tactic is drawn partially from the tradition of literary criticism known as "New Criticism," which was formulated, in part, from the writings of the poet and critical essayist T.S. Eliot, particularly his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1917/2001). Here he espouses how the virtues of writing are best understood and criticized as independent works detached from contemporary trends in style and voice. He asks that critics refrain from examining a work's import as a corpus that retains temporal and traditional characteristics; for example, he asks that we not perceive Jane Eyre as a work of a 19th century Romantic author, but instead as the work on its individual merits. Eliot reasons that critics are in error when they consider the life and history behind a text. He explains that such meanings are lost on readers who are not cognizant of an author's history. He concludes that the critic's prerogative is to focus only on a work's explicit characteristics. Latter-day literary scholars have stepped away from this approach on the grounds that it denies the

study of social impact on a creator's life and also that of

the leverage of the creative tradition. I too believe mad

rhetorical theorists can read the text both as a complete

statement and as a product of its history. As Phillip

Tompkins (1994) argues, the rhetorical critic should search

for meaning only in the text through the use of valid and

defined criteria, but the text itself is the creation and

resident of many different social realities, therefore its

examination also necessitates the nuances of background

information and reception analysis. The critic, as a reader

of a text and a product of the interpretive communities

that Stanley Fish (1976) discusses, should also endeavor to

own their own particular expectations for the creation in

their criticism, for it colors their personal perspective

as they search for mad rhetorics. The level to which this

particular Fishean approach to the analysis of a text is

incorporated into an individual criticism of a work I leave

to the critic, but it is appropriate that the critic

attempt to establish the cultural perspectives they are

exhibiting in their analysis either explicitly or

implicitly.

By remaining fixated on a text, act or fabrication, a

critic can demonstrate where and how a rhetor employs

radically unique ideas and, furthermore, how such acts also

demonstrate the way in which they choose to cushion their

deviation in expressions they assume others could

appreciate. By then placing the text in proper historical,

biographical, and receptive contexts, I propose that we can

build a whole-piece approach to categorizing and critiquing

radical creativities as well as a heuristic toward

qualifying the mad rhetor. In bridging the gaps between

critiques of a mad rhetoric as a complete statement, a

product of its historical creation, and as a work received

through the critic's own perspective driven interpretation,

I also believe that we are able to build a responsible

representation of a mad rhetoric's social existence.

Facets of Conscious Radical Creativity

One of the functions of the radically creative idea

and its execution is to distinguish itself from other ideas

within a work and from ideas that have been produced and

included in other works in the tradition to which that work

belongs. Furthermore, the radical idea must also disrupt

the form of the work in which it appears, so that the work

becomes a uniquely and radically different work within that

tradition, In doing so, the radical idea does not so much

discursively assault the underlying meaning of the work as much as it subverts the sum total of the expression and shifts its stature. To apply an illustrative metaphor, the radical idea is similar to a outfacing window in a maze: it shifts the obstacles therein from being inescapable into being matters of a challenge. An example of a radically creative idea in a work of popular culture would be the appearance of the monolith in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick. Signaling a change in the film from the science fiction movie genre, the viewer enters into a treatise on the nature of human consciousness itself, the monolith is at once a foreign object to the surrounding primitive environment filled with primates and a beacon symbolizing the primates' evolution into the use of tools. Every scene thereafter compounds upon the monolith's original disturbance of the conventional science fiction premise, thus the radically creative idea usurps the flow of the entire film's meaning. Radical creative ideas in a work often do usurp the participant's attention, whether the artist intends it to or not. Radically creative ideas can color a creation quite strongly, so their communicators sometimes do choose to take on that element as the foundational conflict or direction of their works,

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however they need not always take this path. For example, the character "the Fool" from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, who helps steer a liege through rough waters of mental anguish, using both mockery and genuine caring. This is an instance where a mad rhetorical element did not usurp the focus of the story, which is about the bequeathal of life-legacies and the aging process, but merely bent it in another existential direction. While certainly the court jesters of old were afforded the liberties of mocking the court, the Fool casts riddles and jests to bring the man to whom he owes his allegiance out of a mire of confusion with a genuine sense of loyal compassion, thus embodying the idea of the mad rhetor at work. The Fool's radically creative actions shift Lear back into the realm of reason.

However, the absence of such actions completely defines the existential horror of Munch's *The Scream* (1893), which portrays a mad rhetor as its central figure, whose scream literally disrupts everything around him or, alternately, becomes the representation of this global primal disruption taking place. Another example of a full mad rhetorical work, with a maddened concept taking center stage lies in the livid carnalities the Marquis De Sade utilizes in many of his works to imply the meaning of sex

in a political world, finding debasement not only as a function of sexual rampage but also as a function of the scatological oppression of the masses by their leaders. In a similar fashion, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729) proposes the mad rhetoric of anthrophagy as a "modest" solution to the dehumanization of the Irish proletariat by English overlords who treated them like cattle. Such a viciously absurd solution is the focal point of the essay for the reader, even though it is intended to direct attention to the inhumanity of what is occurring. In short, analyses of radical creativities can either break down a work into conventional elements to show how such acts shift the rhetorical structure of a "normal" performance or creation, or they can interpret ways in which a radically creative idea in a work's content serves as the foundation of an act of mad rhetorical address. Acts and texts whose form and subject matter have been shifted by radical creativities are what I also term mad rhetorics: they are complete treatises that focus on how the sway of one or more radically creative ideas can alter the direction of creative artifacts or acts.

To break down an example of the development of a radical creativity, we can cite DD Palmer's discovery of

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his new and radically different form of physical therapy: chiropractic care (Wardwell, 1992). At the time (1895 to be precise), Western therapeutic and surgical practices were still focused on treating bone, nerve, and muscular conditions. While it was recognized that the spine played an important role in the maintenance of the human physique, it took the inventiveness of Palmer to isolate the treatment of that most fundamental of bone structures. Palmer, a quack magnetic therapist, was an avid studier of the human physique, so when he noticed a hump on one of the patients he was treating with his magnets, Palmer had a spontaneous revelation (the *chora* of this particular example). Utilizing his prior learning in medicine to execute a radical new therapy (the formulation of a radical creativity and then the maddened-application into an act of physical rhetorical exchange), Palmer approached the man and quickly adjusted him in an attempt to rid him of his outgrowth. The man later related that he had been deaf ever since he had the accident that caused this bump, but when Palmer adjusted his spine spontaneously, he was able to hear again. With Palmer's deliberate act of therapeutic application, he was able to take the spontaneous germ of inspiration born from his observations, process it through

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his learning in medicine, and then devise a innovative applied rhetoric that cured the man of his deafness. In this act of radically creative invention, Palmer was able to apply his mad rhetorical design for treatment and found the discipline of chiropractic care.

Radically creative ideas can take many forms in relation to the works they augment. To visit the world of fiction for some examples of radically creative ideas in action, we can see that they can take the form of a character, a background or even a presence that affects the outcome of the story in some elliptical fashion. The character of Big Brother in George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and the "crime" in Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1920) are sinister examples of these kind of precedential concepts that bend the meaning of the work they inhabit. Each distorts and expands the genre of fiction novels by introducing the omnipotent sign of oppression and the tyranny of incomprehensible bureaucracy and inane jurisprudence respectively. Certainly there are precedents in the political and fictional worlds that bear some similarity to the themes that are portrayed in these texts, such as the propaganda of Stalin and the grinding bureaucracy of early 20th Germany, but it is the genius of the two authors to

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take these existential themes and graft onto them a radically original level of meaning. Big Brother is not just Stalin, but the all-seeing eye of an evil deity glaring down upon the slaves that do his unspoken bidding. The "crime" is not just a decree of social condemnation and a warrant for arrest but an edict of existential damnation that forces the character (and the plot that follows him) into a spiral of wrenching events that lead nowhere. Some might argue (Trujillo, 1992) that the story bears similarity to the concepts Fyodor Dostoevsky lays out in the *Crime and Punishment* (1866) but that crime is illusionary and is the central, absurd plot of the story makes it a work wholly of Kafka's invention. These may not be the only radically creative ideas to be found within those two works, but they help define their respective mad rhetorics and their unique influences on Western thought are as strong now as they were when they were originally published.

The question, then, is what defines an idea or construct as a formula for a radical creation and not a mere innovation? There is no hard and fast rule for this, but there are elements that can be identified. Firstly, the concept that a radical creation introduces must form

something precedential. By contrast, prior record of similar concepts would make reiterations extensions or homages, not radically creative endeavors. When we apply this stipulation to the interpretation of a single author's work, we assume a radically creative act is an extension of a continuing rhetoric, unless its creator employs tropic forms of parody or irony in some unique fashion. However, it would be erroneous to think that mad rhetorics fall outside the bounds of traditional modes, codes, and genres. Paradigms such as the tragic novel and the comedic play are the very cloaks that envelop the distorting pupas that are radically creative ideas. Secondly, mad rhetorics are defined by their chosen field of expression's conventions and how the mad rhetorics use those "rules" to incorporate their radically creative idea. They use terms and stylistic elements that readers and viewers can appreciate. Thus, mad rhetorics can be identified not only as phantasmagorical elements or statements but also by the style in which they are sewn together in traditional genres or styles. Key to understanding this conceptualization is that an act of radical creativity is not an act of creative singularity but rather, at least initially, a fringe omnibus to its genre. For example, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

(1952) follows in the footsteps of many of its surreal and experimental staged dramatic predecessors, but, in time, it extended even the limits of many of those plays, in its portrayal of tyranny of expectation and the conditioning of human complacency in the face of immateriality. Nothing may happen, twice, in *Godot*, but that nothing is its radical creative element.

Thirdly, a mad rhetoric can be assessed by its multiple historical conditions of perception. This consideration may perhaps be the most ominous task of all for critics investigating potential mad rhetorics, precisely because of the expanse of mediated consumption and the many levels at which social politics may affect expressed opinions regarding works. As Nietzsche (1886/1989) relates, the function of the übermench's ideas is particularly not to be the norm of the time of their release. Lack of acceptance forces creators to work and exist outside of the heart of society lest they become subverted by the many demands for conformity. Still, the discount of the radically creative idea once it is placed into the clutches of popular banality, is exactly what Debord (1995) finds to be integral to modern life's demands for an endlessly cyclical public "spectacle" of the

consumption and regurgitation of goods and ideas. Even the

mad rhetor's removal of their strict allegiances to the

intellectual politics of society is not an easy or clean

break, despite Nietzsche's insistence on its valor. Indeed,

most people have inevitable ties to institutions and groups

that they cannot sever. These "others" often have the

capacity and the desire to confine and restrict such

"deviant" individuals. Often, they use the label of

"madness" to confine these individuals in asylums, as both

Foucault (1965) and Cooper (1974) discuss. Thus, critics

should make note of the contemporary context of a mad

rhetor's act or artifact is presented in for the purposes

of their analysis. Whether this accounting takes the form

of a reception analysis, a survey of contemporary critical

responses, or a detailed description of the genre the mad

rhetoric was trying to enter, context is at some level an

available framework that modern receivers can use to

understand the care with which the author chose to frame

their work. By understanding this intangible influence on a

work, we can understand its social gravity. As Branham &

Pierce (1985) suggest, a creative work is born within the

political universe where that text may be interpreted in

the context of other current texts and ideographs. Beyond

the contextual atmosphere a text exists in, the study of audience reception is a just as critical to understanding a work's communicative impact in the social sphere as are the components of the text itself (Carragee, 1990), so it can be feasibly concluded that mad rhetors understand the import of playing to such expectations in the formation of their radical creativities, Despite the best constructive efforts mad rhetors take in seeking popular understanding, like other revolutionary rhetorical artifacts, many of their works go unrecognized as significant expressions until years after they create their works, possibly even years after their creator's passing. As scholars Read (1967) and Rotenberg (1978) point out, some creators that work heavily in the realm of the avant-garde fear condemnation and intrusion, so they feel compelled to retreat from society in order to create authentic work. Because of this removal, many works stay out of the popular social world for years before they are discovered, although the works of such artists as Salvatore Dali and Jackson Pollack suggest that this kind of physical removal does not always lend itself to creative obscurity. Also, when mad rhetorics by such sequestered artists are trickled out into the social world, depending on their construction, they may

seem so alien as to cause their intended public to condemn them as deviant or to reject them for a lack of cultural relevance.

With these limits in mind, critics often find it difficult to identify the cultural impact of a work and the levels of appreciation it receives from its publics. By including a thorough accounting of a work's historical reception and complete biographical information, I intend to more correctly frame a critique of mad rhetoric as products of mad rhetors within their own times. When available, autobiographical accounts from the mad rhetor in the form of notes, essays, and other recordings provide especially profitable ports into the concerns and the visions these creators experienced in their quest to communicate their radical creativities. Such creators thus supply some insights into their personal struggles with producing and releasing such works or acts. These accounts may also offer us some idea of whether such creators may have truncated their works or acts for the purposes of wider and more positive exposure. Of course, the very difficulties that expressing the radical creativity act fosters in an individual may also prevent them from fully expressing such things in personal notes, reports, and

correspondence. The artist may also practice deceit and discretion in relations with others about the work. It is even possible that the creator may not be able to comprehend and express rationally an act of radical creativity in the same form they actually use to produce their work or act. I would suggest that radical creativity, as with most creativities, may seem to take the form of an idea plucked from the æther itself. Much as Mary Shelly recalled plucking the idea for "Frankenstein" from a waking dream, so too do many other mad rhetors come across their radically creative ideas in their own ways. Creators may not understand its source, instead merely understanding their vision in the completed form. An example of this kind of spontaneous genius might be Keith Richards' dazed and impromptu composition of the guitar riff from the record, *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction)*, a song credited with popularizing the Rolling Stones' harder sound to rock music fans worldwide. To return to the notion of the mad rhetor's fear of social exposure, it is also conceivable that some might choose not to emphasize their procedures and inspirations, fearing that someone might abscond with what they fear might be "evidence" of delusion or other disconcerting external classifications. Finally, a rhetor

might believe that someone perusing their personal communications might take a mentioned invention and present it as their own, a real consideration when we consider the potentially groundbreaking nature of a radically creative rhetoric.

Finally, a mad rhetorical act or artifact must deviate from the reader's expectations without immediately losing the reader's attention and comprehension. In short, radical creativities are chaotic psycho-rhetorical organisms that squirm within a particular work, acts that demand a conduit be established between the author's hyper-conceptualization and the consumer's ability to comprehend. For example, the infamous ending of Tod Browning's film *Freaks* (1932), where the duplicitous Cleopatra is forcibly mutilated into becoming a monster, depicts the sheer horror of an act that defies conventional reason and thus establishing a direct message-transfer from Tod Browning to the viewer regarding the ravenous nature of human vengeance. Admittedly this ideographical rapture will mean many simply will be unable to comprehend or digest a work (as so many contemporary viewers of *Freaks* seemed to fail to do) or even recognize the mad rhetoric as a kind of deviance. Also, many creators might not want their work to be seen as radical at all. A

work cannot be automatically classified a total mad rhetoric if it contains radically creative idea, however this exemption likely only occurs in acts or artifacts where the radically creative idea makes up only a minor part of the work's overall fabric. The genre that the author assumes audiences will comprehend must be stood upon its head, or, at least, partially contradict itself; it must shift away from the style and subject matter it appears to be pursuing, so that the mad rhetorical work forms a nexus of communication between the rhetor and the audience. The mad rhetoric is in this way a communication using a mutual "language" the rhetor and reader can employ and understand, the rhetor draws the audience toward the guiding star of their unique vision without losing that person to either distraction or misunderstanding. We should see that guiding process as the central constructive element of the mad rhetoric, so that we can discover within it the essence of the radically creative use of language and form to expand the collective consciousness.

Textual Structures of Mad Rhetoric

Interestingly, works of mad rhetoric are both genres
in the process of becoming and genres converging on some
form of subjective expression. Rhetoric itself can be found
at many levels of human communication, as can other
applications of persuasion and of intellectual and
emotional expression. Rhetoric is one of a number of the
foundational modes humans use in their quest to convey
their thoughts to others. Rhetoric can be classified by
forum, by channel, by subject, by method and by
environment, but rarely are rhetors classified by only one
of these acutely. As an example, a mathematician is not
just a mathematical rhetor but a person whose chosen
formulae for expression concerns primarily the mechanics of
mathematics. Those formulaic communications do not define
the mathematician, any more than do the specialized forms
of communication used by other specialists, for they
represent a means of a common language to communicate a
specific kind of information. For the mad rhetor, however,
the mad rhetoric they communicate does define their tenure
as a mad rhetor, and mad rhetorics have no native language
of their own. Mad rhetorics are always works of translation

from the radically creative idea into another commonly understood language.

The reason for this comes down to one of the key mechanics of the mad rhetoric itself: the maddening of radically subjective ideas into communications others can understand. A radically creative idea is a distinctive one, a definitional one sprung from the rhetor's mind into a missive or other work or act. One can see its character in the form of the *Mona Lisa*'s smile, a taunting image Di Vinci cast upon the world from his easel that speaks so much without moving its lips. As such, it is as close to being its own entity as a concept can approach in the skein of human communication. Indeed, a mad rhetoric is a part of the rhetor's consciousness that would not have sprung forth into that world had the rhetor not taken steps to weave it back into the fabric of common understanding. If the rhetor were to have failed, this radically creative idea would still be a part of that person and understood by them alone. Thus, the radically creative idea and the mad rhetoric carry the imprint of the person that constructs and communicates them, giving that person a unique ownership unknown to other fields of knowledge and communication. One cannot speak of a mad rhetoric or

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radically creative idea without mentioning the person who created it, such is the connection between the rhetor and the mad rhetoric.

In this way, a distinct identity of a mad rhetor emerges from fray of common thought as a suffragist for cultural attention that transmutes that person's being into their work. Mad rhetors rank a step above even the most ingenious creator's verve, in that they are forcing parts of their own minds into molds intended for social appreciation, disjoining these parts from themselves into freed forms. The mad rhetor and the radically creative act are distinct onto themselves, but there is always a tether between the two: the work bears a maker's mark, if you will. It is through this transferal that a critical text that captures the spirit and the image of the mad rhetor becomes something of a mad rhetoric in itself. Just as mad rhetorics are themselves unique, so too are texts about and by the mad rhetor that spawns them. Hence, we must identify that individual first as a product of their own being and then by the way in which their presence affects an artifact or performance. A prime example of one creative situation mimicking such a parallax is Cervantes' relationship with Don Quixote, a man in the troughs of mad rhetoric who is

himself Cervantes' mad rhetorical example of the adverse

and surreal effects of sincere morality, in an age where

his antiquated notions of chivalry no longer held popular

meaning.

The final frontier of mad rhetorical address is

something of a phantasmagorical illusion: the mad rhetors

as they see themselves in their mad rhetorical states. An

example of this can be found in the famous triptych

painting by Hieronymus Bosch *The Garden of Early Delights*,

which contains, many argue, a portrait of the painter as a

distorted and disemboweled sinner suffering in the imagined

hell of the painting panel. Of all of the mad rhetorical

situations, this is perhaps the most rare, as it represents

one of the most difficult patterns for the rhetor to

capture comprehensively. It also is perhaps the one mode of

address that allows the critical analyst to understand best

what the mad rhetorical process is as it moves from the

creator's mind through transmutation into an artifact. If

we are to understand a mad rhetoric as a minute portion of

its creator's consciousness, then it can also be suggested

that this kind of rhetorical situation best captures

available mad rhetors looking at their own fleshstuff as

mad rhetorical personae. Certainly, the self-portraits of

Dali, such as his 1921 *Self-Portrait* that has a pastel-laden Dali-head floating about a swirling landscape in a fixation of contemplation, capture the mechanics of this. So too might the lyrics of a Frank Zappa song, such as *Flower Punk* (1968), allow Zappa to spin a song-anthem-joke about his projected identity as a prototypical music industry musician. Another example of such a self-focused depiction would be the fictional psycho-graphical writing of William S. Burroughs in *Naked Lunch* (1959), a mad rhetorical jaunt through vivid scenes of drug use, vice, and manic writing that employs a litany of fictionalized asides drawn from Burrough's life. It is in these examples that the mad rhetoric might be said to have the most difficulty bridging the gap between the rhetor's consciousness and the external intellectual world. One's own perception of oneself is obviously quite dizzying, and only the masters of a craft can make such depictions "accurate" in forms that others can appreciate.

Indeed, it is in these self-reflexive creations that the mental illness quotient of many mad rhetors seems so important, for it is here that mad rhetors are most subject to their own expressed perceptions of the part their radical creative personalities play in their lives and thus

the part that probably makes them most prone to mental anguish. In the absence of their own linear notes, it is impossible to divine their creator's exact reactions and thoughts, but through the scope of such self-reflective artifacts, we can glean general perceptions they wished to profess through their work. One should note, however, that these self-referential acts are also the most potentially dangerous for creators, for they directly reference themselves through the mesh of their crafted self-portrait, risking negative repercussions and worse from their audiences. It is thus understandable why most artists cannot or will not produce such works, although they frequently employ allegory in their stead. An example of such a deferred representation would be Da Vinci's painting *St. John the Baptist*, which many feel was a work that inferred Da Vinci's own appreciation of homoeroticism in a time when such imprints would have been publicly forbidden.

In order to demonstrate the breadth of these mad rhetorical principles that I have formulated, I have chosen three different texts that demonstrate three different elements of mad rhetorical address. I will analyze a story by H.P. Lovecraft, "The Music of Erich Zann," (1921/1982) that I believe captures the mad rhetor as a fictive figure

in the form of a phantasmagorical mad rhetoric. I will also

analyze a self-portrait by Van Gogh produced in 1889

featuring primarily blue tints that currently hangs in the

Musee d'Orsay in Paris, which I believe demonstrates how

the mad rhetor sees himself in a mad rhetorical state.

Finally, I will investigate the mad rhetorical semiotic

qualities of David Lynch's surreal film *Eraserhead*

(1977/2006) as means of demonstrating how a mad rhetor can

alter the form of a film into a multilayered metaphor for

sickness without mentioning it directly. I intend to show,

therefore, that all of these works provide concrete

examples of mad rhetorical principles that can be analyzed

in artifacts.

Critical Frameworks for Analysis of Mad Rhetoric

As part of my expository argument for a proper

theoretical view of a selective branch of mad rhetorical

works, I propose some methods here for the analysis of

artifacts that will isolate the qualities of mad rhetorics

and that borrow from other scholars analytical frameworks.

Future work with the theory may, in fact, expose and test

rubrics specific to the critiquing of mad rhetorics, but

for this particular critical analysis, I have chosen to

incorporate the work of other critical scholars who have earned a more established position within the critical canon and whose theories have been tested in such a manner as to add the necessary weight to my arguments.

In terms of the Lovecraft text, in order to expose the non-standard elements of the work, it will be useful to employ a hermeneutical approach, using the practices suggested by the textual interpretist scholars Stanley Fish and Paul Ricoeur. The reader might wonder why I have chosen these two scholars over the superficially more appropriate work of the psychoanalytical scholars of rhetorical and textual criticisms. My motives, as stated previously, are to focus on the text itself in my critique, which I will then frame in a recounting of the author's life and condition through biographical and autobiographical statements the author and others have supplied. In so doing, I will be able to locate the manner to which the text forms and contains mad rhetorics, as well as the opinion of the author about the piece and his state during its writing per his accounts and biographical facts.

To return to my reasons for employing Fish (2005), this particular theorist, in his mature scholastic criticisms, has touted a form of reader-response criticism

which calls for a subjective interpretation of a work without delving into a completely singular identification of that text, using personal interpretation to identify cultural meanings and interpretive communities that confer ideas recognizable by a whole swath of culturally-attuned readers. Fish argues for the existence of an infinite spectrum of meanings within the historic expectations of a work's community of readers, so it is my belief that by analyzing the text from the standpoint of the modern fan of the kind of "weird" science fiction audience Lovecraft was primarily writing to for publication in pulp magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, I can note how he uses conventions of science fiction writing to wrap his mad rhetorical plot points and characters in comprehensible cultural language. Although it has been nearly 100 years since the story's publication, I believe that I share an understanding of enough of the common White American cultural values that I believe he sought to appeal to in his work, a key factor when one considers that Lovecraft was writing to the "weird" science fiction fan who was expecting from pulp literature not only tales regarding the interference of "things from beyond the stars" but, also, appeals to social morality. I believe these cultural expectations are still

recognizable enough to a later-day analyst with a similar background and taste in literature. I therefore believe I can take note of the author's use of the norms of the genre of "weird" science fiction to formulate his story, as well as how he breaks those conventions in relating his mad rhetoric. I will also be searching the text for ways in which it connotes the roles of culture, of music (being that that is the focus of the story), and the plight of the mentally infirm. I will also examine the way in which it uses the supernatural to evoke its dramatic climax. The text's treatment of mental illness and its use of supernatural overtones are keenly germane to my argument, as they are the mechanics that frame the music of the title as a mad rhetoric that subverts the story's course toward the bounds of a mad rhetoric.

In addition to this Fishean examination of the text, I would also like to take note of its patterns of empirical causality. Using Ricoeurean (1981) terms, I will show the story's subtle bending toward its final mad rhetorical "corruption." Mad rhetorics, especially when written by an author with an affinity for the fictive bizarre like H.P. Lovecraft, break with the norms of dialogical and realistic causal reality as they advance toward their own unique

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vision. I thus will note how the tale becomes disjoined from earlier contextual references to the known world's workings within the text. As a horror writer, Lovecraft often used this resulting fundamental "weirdness" to give impetus to the impact of his stories. Often his climaxes drive the protagonists into fright reflexes or worse. I believe by demonstrating how Lovecraft digresses in this way, I can demonstrate his authentic intentions to induce a horrified response while still exploring the way in which the story evolves into a mad rhetoric.

The text of the short story that I will be analyzing will be taken from a collection of his work entitled *In The Best of H.P. Lovecraft: Bloodcurdling Tales of Horror and the Macabre* published by Ballantine Books in 1982. After reading the text multiple times, I will take copious notes from which my final analysis will be formulated with the addition of biographical information and quotes from other relevant scholars.

In the second of these three analyses, I will assess the Van Gogh painting using the rigors of an aesthetic argument. Graphic art is arguably the most explicit of the creative activities and yet it is also one of the most difficult to qualify. It is my assertion, therefore, that

this research can benefit most from a post-structural analysis, primarily because it gives it some grounds to understand the work's manufacture and, thus, the mad rhetorical deviations contained within it. I will be using schema proposed by Sonja Foss (1994) that she argues breaks down visual art into its functional components for analysis, asserting that each separate functional component of the represented rhetoric adds to its overall communicated message, which she also notes may not always be what the rhetor strictly intended. She suggests that there are three different maneuvers a rhetorical critic can take in their plans to analyze the function of an artifact, namely the identification of the function communicated through the image, how well the materials and style communicates that desired function, followed by a critique of the soundness of the function, by which she means the consequences of the functions in terms of how successful they are at communicating what they appear to be attempting to communicate.

I believe the use of Foss' schema helps my search for mad rhetorics at two levels, both of which I feel will help expose Van Gogh's work as a mad rhetoric. By using the schema to first analyze how Van Gogh attempts to

communicate the form of his self-portrait as a creation based on the traditions of self-portraiture that were present in his era, I can demonstrate how he attempts to provide a recognizable form which others may understand. After that, I would proceed to analyze the aspects of the painting that I suggest Van Gogh uses to communicate his mad rhetoric, followed by a discussion of how that image functions to alter the painting into a mad rhetoric and how it affects the overall composition's function as a message of self-identity.

I will also include with my analysis a discussion of the painting's history, the life and times of the painter, notes on its construction, and some digression into the painter's own self-professed reasoning regarding his work. Van Gogh was known to have kept copious detailed notes on his creative process, and I believe these will prove relevant in establishing the painter's intent in creating his work. I believe these to constitute a responsible sourcing of information regarding the work that will help readers familiarize themselves with the "world" of the painting and the painter. While, again, the evidence that makes the work a mad rhetoric can be found within the painting the history of its creation is highly important to

my cause of establishing its precedential nature as a self-portrait of a mad rhetor, explaining Van Gogh's life at that point as a phantom backdrop to its production. I will take my analysis from a viewing an accurate digital file of the painting located at the website http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/gogh/self/gogh.self-orsay.jpg , as I am unable to travel to Paris to examine it in person.

The final text I will be analyzing in search of mad rhetorical patterns is the film *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) which was written, edited, and directed solely by David Lynch, thus qualifying it as a radical creativity constructed from his writings and ideas alone. I am drawn to analyzing this film primarily because of the nature of its surrealism that appears superficially to be a capture of a strange landscape filled with strange personas engaging in strange behavior. Critiques regarding this work abound in the film studies literature, and most of these analyses choose to find metaphorical meaning for the many bizarre happenings within the film, critiquing the whole story from, among other styles, psychoanalytic, deconstructionist, and Marxist perspectives; a fair share of these analyses also employ semiotic critical frameworks,

a critical tradition I will also employ in my own critique
of the film, if for different reasons altogether. It is my
supposition that the film is a mad rhetoric at a structural
level, bending meaning in such a way as to present the film
as a complete semiotic metaphor for a "reality" that is
never shown, mentioned or addressed within the picture
except as a function of its structure.

Because I am suggesting that such a radical shift of
meaning exists in this text, my analysis of it must first
attempt to capture its superficial meaning, which,
ironically, is filled with deep metaphorical meaning all
its own. Indeed, one of the film's greatest strengths is
that is mystifies at completely different levels of
reception, so I will be using the work of Janet Staiger
(2000) in order to address how the "front" level of
semiotic meaning is received by the casual audience. For
the "back" level of meaning, I will be using the
methodologies suggested by Vladimir Propp (1928/1962) to
map out how the semiotic structure of the story presents a
hidden discursive meaning in the film: that of interior of
a man's mind slowly being consumed and warped by a brain
tumor. While Propp worked primarily with the functions of
the fairy tale, his tactics for mapping out the structure

of a story are still useful to my effort, even as his

conjectures regarding his process are negated due to the

shifting of the genre. Therefore, it is my view that this

is an appropriate appropriation of a valid analytical

method without investing my analysis with the weight of

inapplicable prescriptions for meaning. I will also be

consulting critical writings on the film from other

scholars as well as notes and interviews from Lynch to

report his own feelings on the film. Finally, I will

incorporate information regarding the film's release

history in order to suggest how the qualities of this mad

rhetoric demonstrated the features of precedential

chronotopography at the time of its release, thus

fulfilling one of the stipulations for classification as a

mad rhetoric.

My data collection will be taken from the viewing of a

copy of the official *Eraserhead 2000* DVD released by

Absurda/ Subversive Company in 2006. I have chosen this

particular version the film among its multiple releases

because it offers a commentary track by Lynch himself,

which other editions do not. I will view the whole film

three times, taking notes noted by time code. In my

analysis, I will report my findings in the form of a

narrative structural diagram of explicit "front" narratemes. I will then draw back and demonstrate how these narratemes obscure and correspond to the "back" narratemes that make up the narrative structure I am suggesting the movie intends to communicate. I will discuss why these two parallax narrative structures make the film a mad rhetoric. I will also include a discussion regarding the writer-director's choices in producing such a discursive construct, using notes the director has made public and my own personal interpretative comments.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MAD RHETORIC AS PLOT DEVICE: H.P.

LOVECRAFT'S "THE MUSIC OF ERICH ZANN"

A Stranger "Weird" Tale

In this chapter, I will analyze H.P. Lovecraft's short story "The Music of Erich Zann" (1921/1982) in order to demonstrate the way in which he uses a mad rhetoric and a mad rhetor as the backbone of his plot. In his short publishing lifetime, Lovecraft was able to craft some of the most profound works of fantastical fiction the world had seen up until that point, filled with creatures and situations that stretched the bounds of the mind's eye. These wild excursions made Lovecraft's work a fertile ground for the discovery of mad rhetorics, but it is in this short story that I believe we are able to see Lovecraft's most unique, singular contribution to fiction.

In Erich Zann, we find a profoundly mad rhetor fully engrossed in the production of radically creative music. As Lovecraft writes it, his music is wild but symphonic, pure expression tamed only by the musician's massive skill with the viol. What makes the music more than merely bacchanalian in nature, however, is that the reader soon

discovers that it is a strange form of prayer that both holds a strange foreign monster-deity, which I label the "Window MacGuffin" for reasons I explain later, at bay in the form of a strange serenade offering. In telling the mad rhetor Zann's tale through his protagonist narrator's eyes, Lovecraft crafts a mad rhetorical story that effectively contrasts the "normal" narrator and the radically creative Zann. I will be demonstrating here how Lovecraft employs different plot developments and narratives as a way in which to present the radically creative idea of "music as prayer-ward against an unseen force." I will also show how Lovecraft surrounds the story of the mad rhetor and his mad rhetorical music with stylistic and cultural clues that I as a cultured reader of "weird" literature can recognize. By doing so, I hope to be able to demonstrate the way in which Lovecraft, as an author of weird fiction, is able to communicate a particular kind of mad rhetoric through the written word.

Mad Rhetorical Aspects of "The Music of Erich Zann"

Within the pages of this story, we are exposed to at least three different aspects of mad rhetorical theory, all of which are tied together. We have Erich Zann as the mad

rhetor, we have his mad rhetorical music as it plays out in the story, and we have the mad rhetoric that is Lovecraft's inclusion of said music. I have chosen to focus my analysis primarily on the significance of Lovecraft's inclusion, but I would like to discuss in brief some of the story's other mad rhetorical aspects. First, what makes Erich Zann a mad rhetor is the mad rhetoric that is his music. In the story, Zann never directly performs his radically creative music for his neighbor's listening pleasure, so there might be some argument as to whether he is actually performing in a creative manner that would be appreciable by others. I believe the atmosphere nature of music always allows it to reach beyond any playing space, and Zann as a musician would be aware of this. Thus, although he seems to be playing with reverence only to whatever force lies beyond the window, Zann would know that at some level he might also be engaging in rhetorical exchange with others indirectly, regardless of his desire to sequester himself.

To look at the nature of the character, Zann is a foreign entity in the land he inhabits. If we are to accept that the narrator is of an Anglo heritage, so too is he then also assumed to be a sojourner in this presumably French environment. Still, the narrator is certainly the

more sociable and acculturated of the two. The narrator is thus the perfect foil for Zann, who is a classically "weird" character anyway. Zann himself bears a feral human nature that is just fantastical as are those Shakespeare's Caliban bears; these less than human traits also point to his fundamental "weirdness" (Joshi, 1980). Like many weird heroes and villains, he is also a tragically existential as a man doomed to a fate he can't avoid. Even in his native Germany he would probably be an Othered individual because of his weird mannerisms and his own desire to sequester himself.

Despite his depleted personal interaction with the world, Zann is an effective mad rhetor in that he is an obvious master of his instrument. The narrator takes note of the genius of the musician which is apparent to even his untrained ears. His musicianship is marked in its virtuosity and is improvised with a refined fervor that could only be due to an intense level of skill with the viol. That he was adding the strange notes onto the relatively stable bar music structure coherently proved Zann's mettle, but that he was able to do so in a rapid, improvised fashion that the unskilled narrator was able to

appreciate defines him as a unique, radically creative talent.

As we are able to cite the response of the narrator to the mad rhetoric within the bounds of the story, we can see the dynamics behind one person's encounter with a musical mad rhetoric. That the narrator recognizes that it is beautiful but beyond the scope of every other style of music that he has heard proves that he appreciates the whole form even if he doesn't understand its technicalities. He comments that he hears that the mad rhetor (Zann) has created music with "recurrent passages of the most captivating quality" that he has difficulty describing; in so doing, the narrator demonstrates the capacity any listener's has to loosely comprehend the quality of an extremely innovative musical performance. Notably, not all of the music that Zann plays is a mad rhetoric, so Zann is not in a state of radical creativity throughout the work. The Zann that we encounter outside of his playing is not a mad rhetor, nor is the Zann that plays for the narrator in his room the first time the narrator comes to his room. Even the Zann that descends into the primal musical state that brings images of "shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through

seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning" to the narrator is not a mad rhetor communicating a mad rhetoric because the sounds that he plays have moved passed the realm of the mutually-understood form of "music" into the sonic rapture of a feral creature "defending" itself against unseen attack in the only way it believes it can.

A Desperate Rhetor Apart

While there are some flashes of radically creative playing near the end of the story, Zann's episodes of mad rhetorical address seem to only come when he is sequestered in his loft. Indeed, as Zann is not physically interacting with the world in any direct way, the music becomes an extension of Zann himself. Faceless and shapeless, Zann's haunting melodies are like a mad rhetorical specter that drifts on throughout his neighborhood. The creation is born of Zann but it is of a greater nature: it is the "completely Othered Zann." Just as Quasimodo in the bell-tower is Dumas' rendition of the Othered disabled outcast communicating to the world, so too is Zann in his attic room communicating in his own "pure" way. As is the nature of mad rhetorics, this playing carries the unique mark of Zann onto the world. His music is a missive from a stranger

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communicating in the way only he can and forcing others to behold his unique rhetoric.

While Zann himself may carry traits of emotional disquietude, he is not mentally disabled. This is an important distinction, for if he were, he would not have been able to produce his mad rhetorics. There is no doubt that Zann suffers from distress for the Window MacGuffin he plays to and fears has true presence in the world, inexplicable as it is, as proven by the narrator's interactions with it. His paranoia is not born of the hallucinations of a schizophrenic, but rather of a terrified old man dealing with something he cannot fully comprehend. Whether he is appeasing it or worshipping is never revealed, but his mental facilities are never questioned until the stories end when, like the narrator, he becomes possessed with absolute paranoid terror. Although Zann does snap, he does so as a manner of the death throes that degenerate all human consciousness in one form or another. Lovecraft never allows us the easy condemnation of the musician as a degenerate and defunct madman. Zann is a human to the very end, making his death a true mortal tragedy.

Analysis of "The Music of Erich Zann"

The Fugue to the Forgotten Street

Lovecraft himself considered "The Music of Erich Zann"
one of his finest works, although he waited four years
before its publication from the time he originally wrote it
in December of 1921 until he had it published in May 1925
(Joshi, 1982). He said the story betrayed little of the
over-explicitness of his other copious narratives; this
tale works less with revealed horror and more with the
implied dimensions of horror and, also, horrific reactions
to terror. This was not a story placed in his "Dreamlands"
group which Lovecraft built on a different tier of
fantastic existence. None the less, this tale possesses
many details that make its progression seem dreamlike and
nightmarish. Although the protagonist's early motivations
seem anchored in real time--- the penniless student to find
residence in the lowest of low-rent hovels--- his
descriptions of his journey and even the locations of the
story immediately betray any notion of time-space solidity.
For example, the protagonist mentions early on that he is a
student at a university, but neither mentions the name of
his university nor even his town. The narrator names "Rue
d'Auseil" as the street on which his home is located, so

one might assume its city to be French, perhaps even Paris.

Still, the name itself, like much in the story, only hints

at real existence, "d'Auseil" being a contraction of the

French phrase "au seuil," meaning "at the threshold," an

appropriate enough description of the protagonist's state

at the beginnings of many of Lovecraft's horrors (*The Thing*

on the Doorstep, written in 1937, being a prime example of

his favoring of this theme). It bears mention, as the

street name is in French and the story was written for an

American audience. This has the effect of initiating non-

French-speaking readers (such as myself) into a sense of

Otherness that exiles them from the nuances of the name's

meaning. In turn, this name forces me to locate the story

in foreign nation with significantly older cultural ties

unfamiliar to me. Still, right from the beginning of the

story, the narrator hints at the location's ephemeral

nature, claiming that he "cannot find the house, the

street, or even the locality" on any of the many maps he

has consulted. Interestingly, just as the narrator is a

student of metaphysics, so the story bears many details

that suggest a parallax existence between the real world

and a more penumbral state. Indeed, it is questionable

whether any of the area's descriptions or any events that

unfold there can be completely trusted. The story is constructed so as to present an intellectual transcription of extremely surreal events that brought the protagonist to great heights of panic.

Beyond fear of the unknown, one of Lovecraft's other devices in the story for stimulating feelings of terror in the reader is to suggest that betrayal of the real has taken place (Joshi, 2001). One of the unique strategies in Lovecraft's fiction is the drive to express concepts and ideas that evoke the reader's protracted, horror-filed while faced, through the main character's eyes, with the malignantly unexplainable. Lovecraft stated in numerous letters that he saw the revilement and hostility that we show those things we cannot understand as one of the keynotes of human character (Joshi, 1996). Lovecraft's tales thus use monsters and inexplicable situations as a method of invoking an atmosphere of xenophobia and revulsion. His narrations usually find a rational, common person in the middle of investigating a strange occurrence, only to be enveloped in a demonic spiral of events that leaves this person at wit's end. These situations then spawn their "testimonials" presented as first-person "warning manuscripts" for others and horrified catharsis

for themselves. "The Music of Erich Zann" (1921/1982) is another in a long line of stories in Lovecraft's work that relates this kind of testified horror, making the tale's general format very familiar to fans of Lovecraft's fiction and "weird" tales in general.

As humans maintain a finite existence, Lovecraft reasoned that their minds always work to maintain intellectual familiarity with their surroundings, so as to ensure they exert some measure of internal and external control over their world. This drive is juxtaposed with their underlying fight-or-flight emotional mechanism that fears for moments when radical changes in temporal surroundings and events cause humans to strike out against the rules of familiar reasonable experience. It is quite possible that, in light of these drives, the author wrote many details of the narrator's accounts as if they were warped imaginings of actual events that had been tainted by unspoken traumatic events. Evidence of this might be found in the narrator's early admission "that (his) memory is broken" and that his "health, physical and mental, was gravely disturbed throughout the period of" his residence at the location. He confesses dismay at the general dislocation of a place that should have been recognizable

to anyone familiar with the unnamed city. Suffice it to say, the narrator appears to believe he is at least recounting the events in as truthful a way as is possible.

We need to take a moment to examine the narrator as he presents himself here early on as a student of metaphysics, it can also be argued that he holds some interest in the profoundly abstract nature of his journey, perhaps even to the point of subconsciously embellishing the tale as a way in which to make it a more interesting presentation of his real existence. By examining the language he uses, we can surmise that the narrator is quite intelligent. While the time of the writing is not strictly specified (mention of motor vehicles certainly places it in the 20th century), we can also assume that the manuscript was produced in an era when a "weird literature" publishing market existed so that it can be read in relation to others like it, although publication is never mentioned as a motivation for the narrator's diatribe (Joshi, 1980).

This early narrative structure is very much in the style of Lovecraft's other stories, but this story's use of a mythical location as a centerpiece of psychological conflict stresses the author's attempt to disjoin it from both the reader's world and the narrator's world. While

allusions are made to other existing places, it should be noted that they are never visited in the telling of tale, so they, in a sense, do not exist in the material world that the narrator describes. Indeed, if we can grasp this early in the story that this separation exists, we can note how Lovecraft is setting the stage for the introduction of radically creative otherworldly influences later on in the story. By immediately shifting the story into a phantasmal dimension, the structure of the story transforms into a kind of linear descent not only into horrific madness, as many of Lovecraft's work do, but also but the spell of the mad rhetoric that is its focus as well. In some ways, descriptions of the narrator's ascent to the home of Erich Zann might be seen as comparable to the journey by the main character to find Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), The narrator sees the signs of environmental corruption by "blear-windowed warehouses" spewing "evil stenches," lending the whole venture an ominous tone. Before the journey up a steep incline to the house itself, the narrator also crosses a bridge before coming to the house, an appropriate symbol of his transportation into another world. Even the location of the house so high up above portends a connection to the heavens, This is notable

when one takes into account Lovecraft's "cosmicist" view. Lovecraft's cosmic "heavens" are populated by nightmarish things of often inexplicable variety. With colossal power and presences that seem on the edge of human reason, these monster-things bear terrible and pernicious motives that regard humanity with the contempt of a cruel master before infinite servitors (Mosig, 1980; Joshi, 2001). Lovecraft, a pronounced atheist, saw the universe itself as a place marked with a general sense of sinister indifference, where morality and even causality bear no measure to its true mechanics. Humans in this canonical viewpoint of the universe, which later writers and scholars have labeled "cosmicism," are very much minor pawns in an eternal game of mindless chess between creatures of burgeoning maliciousness (Boisg, 1980; Joshi, 1996). .Thus the ascent up to the D'Aureil along a road dissembled cobblestones and raw earth is an climb into the bleak endless abyssal "heart of the universe." On this forgotten street, we are clued in to the fact that the narrator has completed his transfer to a place that is fundamentally weird, where the reader understands that mortal rules of everyday life no longer apply.

Once the narrator reaches the neighborhood where the house sits, he sees it is bizarre in and of itself, with houses "tilting crazily" to and fro, and with connecting bridges that resemble threshold arches, so that the narrator is forced to pass underneath them before reaches his destination. As with the bridge before it, these early descriptions again show a transition into another kind of world, a world inhabited by mobs of strange and very old inhabitants who remain silent and uninterested in the arrival of the strange foreigner. Indeed, it reminds one of the sets in the German Expressionist film *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), a film Lovecraft may have seen while writing this story (although he never cites its influence). Upon arrival, the narrator seems to become one of these lost souls, for he admits that he too was "not himself," not cognizant during his travel to this location, and not aware of his own state of decay. The one other verbal communicator in the tale is the owner of the house, himself old and struck with paralysis, who relates the name of the viol player Zann who lives at the highest peak in the entire neighborhood. This again invokes the analogy here with the story of Kurtz, which was by this time very well known to the readers of Lovecraft's fiction. Instead of

finding a broken old man after a descent down a river into the dark heart of a jungle via river, the narrator finds Zann at the peak closest to the cold heaven of the neighborhood's most forbidding structure.

Enter the Damned Musician

After the narrator takes up residence in the house, he begins to interact with Zann himself, which is to say he begins to interact with Zann's music, as the musician is described as being incapable of audible speech. Zann, according to the narrator, earns his living as a cheap movie house musician, a reference that again dates the story to some period in the early 20th century. Zann's occupation seems appropriate for a mute character who communicates primarily through his music. Only later do we come to know Zann through his other communicative facilities. At this point, the narrator is first introduced to the musician by hearing Zann's strange playing wafting down through the air into the narrator's apartment. The narrator then begins to encounter Zann on the stairwells of the building, and right from the beginning Zann takes on the characteristics of a decrepit spook that bears more resemblance to an animal then a man, which befits the wild nature of his music. The narrator describes him as a

"small, lean, bent person, with shabby clothes, blue eyes, a grotesque satyr-like face, and a nearly bald head." Like a caged animal, Zann's first reaction to the narrator is one of anger and fright, which is relieved only by a display of friendliness on the part of the narrator. Zann's mute state is also, a sense, an "Othering" condition, for it forces him to interact with others through non-verbal channels, an unfamiliar method to most Westerners. His German nationality bears some significance, as his nationality adds an additional level of xenophobia to the (presumably) French location. There is also a latently sinister turn to his German nationality one when one considers that this story was written between the two World Wars (as in the 1920 version of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*) by an Anglophilic American. Through these hints, Lovecraft prompts the reader to recognize the musician as an "Other" persona, made all the more removed from the narrator by his stay in the loft above and his inability to speak. Furthermore, as a creature removed even from his own human facilities, Zann seems to be a man haunted in every sense of the word: ghastly pallor, communicating only in wafts of otherworldly tones, and living far away in a haunted place.

When we first encounter Zann's room, we see that it too contributes heavily to his alien identity. Voluminous yet neglected, it is not so much the residence of a man as a room transformed into an echo chamber for his mad playing. As the narrator notes, "evidently Erich Zann's world of beauty lay in some far cosmos of the imagination," a place where the banalities of this world were circumstantial and worthy of ignorance. The room is as much a prison that Zann feels compelled to bolt himself away in as it is a quarters in which to practice his weird sonatas. Zann has, by virtue of turning it into his concert hall, transformed the room into an "Othered Place" where he can serenade the presence that is his dark muse. The notions of "Othering: are mutual, as Zann regularly exhibits xenophobic reactions to the world he interacts with seemingly only as a matter of necessity.

The Wails of a Male Banshee

As the narrator encounters Zann's music, so too do we the readers encounter the music that will become the mad rhetoric within the story. Lovecraft coats Zann's playing with melodramatic descriptions, as the musician begins with a strange concerto that he plays for the narrator from memory and inclination. Lovecraft tellingly describes the

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early playing as a fugue, but I would note immediately that

this initial music is not yet a mad rhetoric, but rather

the same kind of strange haunted music that might be found

in a Bach overture. Its familiarity would make Zann, as the

mad rhetor, be trying his best to communicate with the

narrator in forms of music his listener can understand and

appreciate. It is Zann's purpose to soothe the narrator's

curiosity, so that Zann might experience no further

interruptions.

The narrator seems to appreciate the recital, noting

that it features "recurrent passages of the most

captivating quality." Even though the narrator reports that

he lacks any level of formal musical training or any

experience in musical appreciation, he still finds that he

"was yet certain that none of his harmonies had any

relation to music I had heard before; and concluded that he

was a composer of highly original genius." This observation

presents yet another separation between the narrator and

the musician: a gap in sensitivity and musical

grammatology. Because the narrator is our primary source of

information on the experience, his ignorance shrouds our

ability to fully qualify the oddity of the strange musician

and his haunting melody. Having played the "standard" tune

on the demand of the narrator in hopes of banishing him, Zann reverts to his feral attitude when his aims are not attained.

To suggest that his host play the bizarre music he had heard previously, the narrator begins to whistle, feigning some of the notes of the music that recur in his mind. This seems to cause Zann great distress, suggesting the musician's almost religious respect for his music. By quickly silencing the "blasphemous" and imperfect facsimile with "his long, cold, bony right hand," Zann is quashing a distortion of his mad rhetoric. Although this aspect of his action is usurped by its religious allusions, a certain sense of artist pride may also be at work here. This music the narrator is corrupting with his lack of musical aptitude is, after all, a mad rhetoric that showcases the original genius of the Zann's musicianship. Few artists enjoy seeing their work devalued by imperfect facsimile and, due to the personal nature of mad rhetorical address, Zann may feel some sense of creative invasion on his personality. The religiosity of this act is amplified by Zann's immediate casting of his eyes toward the window that leads out of the apartment. This only escape from the room seems like a vector through which an intruder could enter,

although the narrator dismisses this assumption as ridiculous, given that the window lies so high above the street. The resulting weirdness of the situation calls to mind many other instances in classic and modern horror and suspense literature where an unexplainable threat antagonizes characters. Still, this is the first hint of a presence outside of this dyadic relationship and a portent for the horrific tragedy involving this Window MacGuffin later on in the tale,

The Hidden Horror

This term MacGuffin needs some clarification at this point. The term "MacGuffin" was coined by English suspense filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock, who explained its definition to François Truffaut in 1966 thusly:

> It might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men in a train. One man says, 'What's that package up there in the baggage rack?' And the other answers, 'Oh that's a MacGuffin.' The first one asks 'What's a MacGuffin?' 'Well' the other man says, 'It's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands.' The first man says, 'But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands,' and the other one

answers 'Well, then that's no MacGuffin!' So you see,

a MacGuffin is nothing at all.

The MacGuffin's importance to those who seek it is never

physically shown nor does it truly need to be, for its

implication serves in the stead of a plot motivation. A

MacGuffin is a means to an end of a story, but never its

point; rather, everything that goes on because of the

MacGuffin is the point of the story. In "The Music of Erich

Zann" (1921/1982), the mad rhetorical music is the focus of

the story and the Window MacGuffin is its hidden horror.

This setup is both fundamentally weird in that it deals

with an uncanny situation and fundamentally precedential in

the way it uses music as to demonstrate how Zann is able

appease this hidden horror. The Window MacGuffin bears two

significant differences from traditional MacGuffins. First,

the effect of the MacGuffin's presence does has a spectral

effect the characters in the story, unlike other MacGuffins

such as the Maltese Falcon. This kind of direct

manipulation of people and things in the "real world" by

"unknown forces" is a classic plot element of weird

fiction, although the relatively unique twist here is the

quasi-religious significance that Lovecraft assigns that

force. Secondly, the Window MacGuffin maintains a prominent

and constant local presence in the story, so it has a

dominance position in the story that many other MacGuffins

simply are not afforded. The Window MacGuffin is an unseen

player in Zann's room-world, sinister in a distinctly weird

way without ever losing the anonymous characteristics that

make it so different for the time of the story's writing

(Joshi, 1980).

After shutting down the narrator's blasphemous and

imperfect whistled notes, Zann further restricts his

intrusion by forcibly indicating that he remove himself

from the room. Notably, this comes in response to the

narrator's attempt to glean the nature of the window. This

defensive reverence again suggests that the portal has holy

significance to the mute. After the narrator expresses

disgust at Zann's forceful rejection, the musician shifts

tactics, writing a letter in French to the narrator in an

attempt to apologize for his actions. The selection of

French seems to further indicate the location of the story,

however it also shows the strain Zann demonstrates in his

attempts to relate to the narrator through a common channel

of communication. Zann concludes the interview with an

invitation to the narrator to return and a offer to assist

him in finding an apartment in the building that is less exposed to the drifts of his tones.

The Not-So-Innocent Narrator

Lovecraft leaves interesting and subtle clues here about the nature of narrator's feelings for the musician. The narrator first denotes that Zann's French is "labored" and later that it is "execrable." The judgmental tone of these adjectives shows the narrator's naked contempt for the other man's ability to communicate. When one contrasts his opinion of his neighbor's decrepit nature and relative lack of social ability with his respect for him as a musician, we can speculate that the narrator, at some level, feels that Zann's music is the true expression of his being and that the shell of a human that stands before him is a mere, sad stand-in. It is questionable whether the narrator is aware of these feelings, for he follows those statements with feelings of kinship with Zann, intimating that he believes they share a common bound in their suffering from a "physical and nervous" condition that I would interpret as being a direct reference to mental illness. This disclosure is immediately followed by a reference to the pair's violent reaction to the shuddering of the loft window, a reference and a portent to the symbol

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of the window as a portal to the supernatural. The revelation of this incident ends the pair's initial intimate encounter.

Following this, the narrator comments on his move to a new, lower-floor living quarters, as a "solution" to his issues with Zann's playing so that he and Zann do not increase that friendliness. Zann works to sequester himself away in the room, acting terse when he does encounter the narrator. We see here Zann's dogged return to his xenophobic and purposeful alienation from the narrator. Still, the narrator demonstrates a keen desire to continue to expose himself to the presence of the old man, his secret chamber, and the haunting music that wafts from it. The narrator describes the wild playing as the production of a highly skilled, although totally unrestrained, master of his craft. He calls Zann "a genius of wild power" who seems able to conjure the sounds of an orchestra in his symphonic melodies.

While the player reaches these tremendous highs in his playing, he also seems to be losing his standing in the real world. The narrator says the "old musician acquired an increasing haggardness and furtiveness pitiful to behold," mentioning that he has gone into near total solitude in his

playing in the apartment. Zann no longer allows so much as

the air through his keyhole (which is covered) to intrude

on his self-enforced "Otherness." The musician, through the

eyes of the narrator, seems to be unraveling into the very

notes he plays, his body becomes withered while his

siphoned-off spirit powers the notes that he performs. This

is Zann maintaining the draining state of a mad rhetor,

constantly breaking with the norms of this world to reach

the next with his music. As Zann, in his mad rhetorical

state, disintegrates he becomes evermore the conduit-agent

of his music sent directly to the Window MacGuffin. In

ending his line of communication at with his fellow tenant,

Zann becomes, in a metaphorical sense, a mere extension of

his instrument.

What occurs next seems to starkly demonstrate this

transformation. As "the shrieking viol swells into a

chaotic babble of sound," the narrator, now positioned

behind the door, calls the proceedings a "pandemonium" that

becomes all in itself an exorcised thing. The narrator

hears Zann emit "the awful, inarticulate cry which only a

mute can utter, and which rises only in moments of the most

terrible fear or anguish." If this is not his physical

death rattle, it certainly would appear to be the death

rattle of whatever previous psyche he possessed. This is the dramatic end note of Zann's mad rhetorical playing and the return to his now ravaged body. The cry forces the narrator to attempt to save the musician's life. After a few frantic knocks, the fearful narrator hears Zann stagger to his feet, close the window, and then open the door.

The Descent into the Beyond

What greets the narrator is something wholly different from the other encounters the two have pursued. The narrator intimates that the delight on the face of Zann at the narrator's appearance is real, noting that the old man wore a "distorted face that gleamed with relief while he clutched at my coat as a child clutches at its mother's skirts." There is an obvious hint here of the narrator's feelings of superiority over the wounded man, but the passage also leaves us with an image of Zann reborn as a simpler, needier spirit. No longer charged with his duty as a mad rhetor, he finds himself once again in the pains of the mortal coil. As the narrator enters the room, we see Zann simultaneously at his most pathetic and his most human. He has cast the fetters of his playing to the ground and now sits with the narrator, face-to-face and shaking with the fear of some great intrusion. After he overcomes

this state of existential dread, he attempts some of his most direct linguistic communication with the narrator, writing a note that, by appealing to the narrator's sense of mercy and curiosity, implores him to stay and bear witness to his account of what has happened. Zann has become a man once again. No longer does he employ apologetics nor does he attempt to appease his audience in order that they leave him to his playing, but rather he now seeks to communicate directly with the narrator about what has happened. This is not the Zann whose strange music drifted down the staircase to intrude into the other tenant's mind nor is it the Zann who shut himself away to perform his strange movements. If the bow and viol are the communicative tools that represent Zann's obfuscation, then the pencil and paper is the channel with which Zann is finally able to converse with the narrator freely.

A Desperate Man in his Final Hour

Zann begins frantically to write down his account of the events that have taken place in the hurried scribbles of a man short on time and fearful of impending disaster. Within an hour he has what seems to have been a treatise on the horrors he has seen, which, notably, the narrator notably cannot read when he sees it is scripted in German.

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Again, Zann has abandoned the use of the local dialect in favor of his own native tongue to communicate with the narrator. In so doing, he has reverted back to a language he can more comfortably express but which, ironically, probably sets him apart from the narrator's expertise (the narrator never states whether he understands that tongue). It is unclear whether the papers were meant for the narrator alone or whether he expects the narrator to forward them to others, but it is in fact the musician's final attempt to communicate with a human being. After perceiving a quake and a screeching summons from the window, Zann freezes once again in mortal terror. Again, he begins to play a song meant, it seems, to ward of whatever horrors lie beyond. It is noteworthy that here, in the horrific climax, even the narrator thinks he may hear a beckoning call from the window, "an exquisitely low and infinitely distant musical note" that he himself finds strangely alluring. This melody drives Zann to once again seize up his musical instruments to play a song that the narrator reports is an "awesome noise" that is meant to "ward something off or drown something out." There is no longer any pretext of the production of music for earthy enjoyment here; rather, the production of "fantastic,

delirious, and hysterical" sounds to appease or defend against some supreme, horrific "Alien Other." The narrator notes that this particular music vaguely resembles the sounds of a Hungarian dance that he had heard elsewhere, representing the first time Zann had attempted to play the work of another composer. This derivation is noteworthy in two regards. First, it is music of an even more distant influence than that previously played by Zann. Here we see the strained attempts of an obviously classically trained player to render a popular tune, but we are left to wonder why. Zann is, after all, a player in a theatre orchestra, a popular forum for this kind of music in the story's contemporary era. Although the song being played is never fleshed out, it can be assumed that the music is a production with a kind of earthy flavor, but one that is frenetic enough to demonstrate the musician's extreme stress. Secondly, this is music that is no longer of the design of the musician playing it, which suggests that Zann is no longer in the state he was in his previous playing. This is the human Zann, no longer possessed of the radically creative state he was once in, when he experiences a rapid devolution into total, chaotic, sonic rapture. He is simultaneously desperately trying to retain

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his right to be a creator on this earthly plane and also reverting to the simple style that he might have used when he first learned to play.

In any regard, it is in this final defense that we see quite literally Zann's "heroic weirdness" as a musician. He stands "twisted as a monkey" as he strikes his bow in an extended defense of his soul, a passage that once again hints at the way in which the narrator sees Zann as a man driven to animalistic frenzy. His music literally begins to, as the narrator describes, transubstantiate into "shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning." Zann is a man desperately trying to regain his former "wizardly state," expending his spirit (for the sorcerous side of his character has already been cast out) and achieving yet something of a mad musical illusion. The narrator hears a callback to this, which he denotes as both "calm and mocking," suggesting the decrepit old man is indeed struggling in futility against whatever greater force may or may not be vexing him. Struggling though he is, in Lovecraft's universe he is the model for the "weird hero," expending himself in vain to simply hold back the "horrors that lie beyond."

It is an inhuman effort, however, and soon Zann

descends into a rapturous state, transforming even this

abstract playing into the stuff of umbral abandon. As the

Window MacGuffin begins its final assault on the duo,

slapping open the flaps violently and sending papers flying

that Zann had so frantically written, Zann stands dumb with

his "blue eyes that were bulging, glassy and sightless...

with frantically playing that had become a blind,

mechanical, unrecognizable orgy that no pen could even

suggest." Zann's communication has thus transcended into a

realm beyond rhetorical address.

Flight of a Frightened Soul

While Zann is lost, the narrator moves to the window

to attempt to bear witness to what it had to offer. While

he consciously expects to see an overview of the Rue and

beyond, what he is shown is something profoundly weird:

"the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive

with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything

on earth." At that doorstep to the something beyond human

understanding, the lights go out and the narrator is

trapped between an endless, uncaring void and the playing

of a violin that defies all the rules of music and the

physical world. Here lies the ultimate existential horror:

the very cosmicism that Lovecraft himself so strongly believed in, a system that cast man's role in the universe into an infinitely small, dark, and desolate corner. Witnessing this, the narrator too enters a feral state and begins his flight from the area, the classical response of a fearful mortal in search of ontological, physical, and philosophical safety. He imagines some spectral intruder and attempts to rescue the other occupant of the room to no avail. He flees into the night, never to see the area again. While the narrator admits he has attempted to find the area on a map, he says he is glad that he has not for fear of ever experiencing the events that transpired again.

Lovecraft: The Man behind the Story

H.P. Lovecraft lived a short and difficult life, marked with much promise and disappointment. A child prodigy who could recite poetry at age two and could write complete poems by age six (Joshi, 2001), Lovecraft's lost his parents to mental illness at a young age, portending his own problems with mental and physical illness. Early on, Lovecraft demonstrated a love of reading, an inclination that was encouraged by one of his grandfathers. It was this relation that introduced the future weird

fiction writer to the classic works of Edgar Allen Poe, Arthur Machen, Mary Shelly, and countless volumes of pulp Gothic horror chapbooks (Joshi, 1980). Inspired at the start by these dark romantic writers, Lovecraft went on in later life to adopt his own spin on their grandiose writing style, turning their larger-than-life characters of the Romantics (such as Hiawatha) into gargantuan, alien space avatars like Cthulhu who scoff at the quivering human protagonists like Charles Dexter Ward in their wake. Lovecraft even adopted an antiquated style to his writing that seemed an attempt to join it to this canon of dark Romantic fiction, and his works are littered with many esoteric and anachronistic words (such as cyclopean, eldritch, and antediluvian) that seem to be placed in the text merely to mystify (Joshi. 2001). Lovecraft didn't limit himself to reading these classics, however. He subscribed to many of the leading scientific and historical journals of the day. While the stories he wrote were fantastical constructions, he made the technical aspects scientifically authentic to contemporary findings (Joshi, 1996).

Lovecraft's cosmos, which his direct successor August Derleth has lastingly labeled the "Cthulhu Mythos" after the seminal "Call of Cthulhu" (1924) short story, is one populated by nightmarish monster-things of often inexplicable variety. With colossal power and presences that defy human reason, these abominations have terrible and pernicious motives. They regard humanity with the contempt of a cruel alpha master before infinite servitors on millions of planets (Mosig, 1980; Joshi, 2001). If the Window MacGuffin is one of these creatures (or one of these creature's stronger servitors), then the terrified reaction Zann affords it is as natural as they would be unnatural. One of the original strategies in Lovecraft's fiction is the drive to express concepts and ideas that evoke the reader's protracted, horror-filled dread while faced through the main character's eyes with the malignantly unexplainable. Lovecraft stated in numerous letters that he saw the revilement and hostility that we show those things we cannot understand as one of the keynotes of human character (Joshi, 1996). Lovecraft's tales thus use monsters and inexplicable situations as a method of invoking an atmosphere of xenophobia and revulsion.

His narratives usually find a rational, common person in the middle of investigating a strange occurrence, only to be enveloped in a demonic spiral of events that leaves this person at their wit's end. These situations then spawn their "testimonials" presented as first-person "warning manuscripts" for others and horrified catharsis for themselves. Sometimes these events occur through direct interaction with monstrosities and monstrous situations, but just as often they are the direct result of introduction to forbidden knowledge. Lovecraft uses MacGuffin-like tropes much as Alfred Hitchcock did: to suggest a horrible "true world" in which devastating horrors exist in the penumbral shadows (Cannon, 1989). Lovecraft's writing progresses in increments of horrific revelation toward a climax of cumulative terror. Attaining these "true specks of knowledge" always has a direct effect on the sanity of his protagonists. Ignorance in Lovecraft's work is indeed bliss; knowing these secrets leads to realities that would leave any perceptive individual shriveled with paranoia and mortal fear. Lovecraft's stories don not have heroes so much as they have protagonists who do not become completely corrupted by the knowledge they obtain; conversely, the human "villains" in

his tales are those who have embraced the madness and begun to use it to their own sinister advantage.

Evil does have a Name and a Face

Lovecraft often stated that the creatures that haunted his worlds were his own metamorphic ways of contemplating the liver cancer that ravaged his body his entire life (Moisg, 1980; Joshi, 2001). Certainly, beyond the staple creatures of horror stories like ghosts, witches, and the walking dead that showed up in his work, the abominations that haunted Lovecraft's universe were truly horrific: alien beings that defied understanding (such the sinister Plutonian fungaloid Mi-Go), that hungered chaotically, and that sought power through conquest over lifetimes that knew no end. His Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Dagon, and Nyrlatheotep are all god-creatures of almost limitless power. Humans who can't understand their incredible might stand as impotent before them, as Lovecraft stood impotent before the ravages of his own diseases. His characters are often fated to have these encounters either through foul familial curses (not unlike Lovecraft's own familial legacy of disease) or destinies that beings outside of reason carve out for them. His protagonists are often pitted against "Elder Gods and Ancient Ones" as well as the mad and bloodthirsty

worshippers who have already witnessed these horrific

creatures and been awed into their service.

Artists: Lovecraft's Favorite Accursed

Interestingly, artists of various sorts are assigned

different fates in their interplay with these Cthulhu

Mythos creatures. Whether because they are innately

sensitive or because Lovecraft use them as an extension of

his own authorial presence, he presents creative people as

natural conduits for information intuitively gained from

extraterrestrial encounters. The wild abandon such strange

psychic experiences most often inspire often lead toward

the creation of mad rhetorics, such as the multitude of

strange figurines the protagonist mentions in "The Call of

Cthulhu" (1924). The music of Erich Zann is the result of

just such a process made the focal point of the story,

although the inspiration for the reaction is never

detailed. Zann is one of the few artists Lovecraft ever

focused on as a main character and the situation described

is definitely unique to Lovecraft's fiction; thus, this

work is both a mad rhetoric because of the nature of the

character's rhetoric, because of its precedence in all

fiction (including Lovecraft's), and because it uses Zann

as a mad rhetor as its subject.

Lovecraft's Weird Use of a Musical Mad Rhetoric

Pulling back now, we can examine how the music of

Erich Zann functions as a mad rhetoric within the larger

corpus of Lovecraft's story. First, it is a creation that

distorts the story as other mad rhetorics do. Certainly, it

forms the title of the story, but the story at base level

is about a lonely and confused young man meeting an odd but

equally lonely musician. Zann's music could have easily

been a haunting part of this fictive recounting without

being a mad rhetoric. What sets Lovecraft's use of this

plot device apart from the way other horror writers like

Edgar Allen Poe and Stephen King would employ similar

concepts is that Lovecraft presents the music as a conduit

between the mortal human Zann and a supernatural entity.

The reader is never given an explanation of the true

dialogical nature of this musical communication style save

for the fact that it is queerly beautiful to the ears of

the narrator and that Zann seems possessed in his playing

of it. It is this mystery that makes the music potentially

horrific, for it delves into the unexplained. Certainly,

the Window MacGuffin provides a fiendish bout of terror

when it seems to assault Zann's room near the story's end,

but it is the questions we are left with as to why Zann

communicates with that force that leaves us with uncanny pause. That this conduit is musical in nature and that we are given an imperfect description of it in the pages of a written work makes it all the more unknowable and off-putting. Lovecraft leaves just enough hints to the nature of the music to inflict its full sinister effect onto the reader's mind, haunting us with visions of a master musician who is damned to play concerts for his spectral tormentor.

Such a radically different conceptualization of the power of music was just as radical an idea during Lovecraft's time as it is for our own. It stretched the limits of storytelling with its vague but poignant descriptions of sinister musical overtones. Still, it would not have achieved its full power to terrorize had Lovecraft decided not to frame it in a storytelling style that would have been recognizable to a reader of weird science fiction. Lovecraft considered the unknown to be one of mankind's strongest repositories of fear, the emotion he considered our most strongest and most primal. The strength of "The Music of Erich Zann" (1921/1982) lies not so much in the radically creative idea of the music as in the build up to our comprehension of what it is. There is a fine line

between the alien bizarre and the horrifically weird. The later works because it is surrounded by a mortal story of a "lost" young man coming to know a strange, broken old musician.

Lovecraft's genius is that he portents the final horrific ending again and again throughout his work. The xenophobic and alien nature of Zann, the forbidding nature of the residence, and the morbidly curious nature of the narrator all point directly toward the supernatural climax and the reader's realization of the music's horrific significance. Everything in the story comes to a head when we recognize the profound otherworldly nature of the music itself and every other element of the story is subverted to this final revelation. More so than the portrayal of Zann as a mad rhetor and his music as a mad rhetoric, we are left with the lasting impression of the radically creative idea that Lovecraft implants in his tale: playing music connects us to others, but we can never divine the true nature of our admirers until they respond in the way they see fit. If they are supernaturally weird and malicious as whatever the Window MacGuffin is, we may become possessed by the very music we play, our soul and body mere conduits for the music that becomes a bridge into the abyss.

Further Questions and Ideas on the Use of
Mad Rhetors and their Mad Rhetorics as
Plot Devices in Radically Creative
Works

The mad rhetor as a character within a larger mad rhetoric is an interesting proposition. Mad rhetorics transplant radically creative ideas that are unique to the author into creative situations others can appreciate, so to what level does a character that is part of a mad rhetoric represent the author who is infusing it with their own subjective ideas? I am not suggesting that Zann as a figure is Lovecraft's doppelganger, for they are almost nothing alike. Furthermore, I don't believe it was Lovecraft's intention to ever suggest such a comparison in his prose. He certainly never compared himself to the musician or the narrator in any of his many detailed correspondences. Still, both were creators in different media, so at least a trace comparison can be made between the two's identities. What is interesting about this is what I mentioned earlier in this piece: that Lovecraft often portrayed artists as conduits to the bizarre. Perhaps the unique nature of this story in comparison to other Lovecraft fiction, as a tale stripped of all the direct allusions to sinister alien forces weird authors normally

depict, makes Zann a character most fittingly demonstrative of Lovecraft's unique creative genius. As a man possessed by his own mad rhetoric, Zann is the perfect mirror of the radically creativity that he is and the mad rhetor Lovecraft was when writing this text.

I admit, as a scholar, I am not greatly familiar with the technicalities of music criticism; for that matter I don't believe Lovecraft was either. As a creator of fiction, I don't think the need for highly technical understanding of your subject matter is always necessary, especially when the nature of it is as highly infused with emotional, intuitive response as music is. Still, music as a plot device and music as a subject of written criticism is one of the most difficult propositions for the creative and analytical individual because of the influence performance skill plays in its total effect on an audience. Furthermore, I believe it is difficult to describe the nature of music in strict detail because of its rhetorical existence as an independent, non-lingual agent in the greater atmosphere. Because Lovecraft presents Zann's music in emotional (and occasionally phantasmal terms), it is possible to demonstrate that it is a mad rhetoric in the bounds of a work of fiction and that Zann is a mad rhetor.

Once displaced from the contexts of real world, I believe it would be much more difficult to classify a work of music as a mad rhetoric. I don't doubt that it is possible to identify mad rhetorical live or recorded music, but it would take a specially trained and experienced critic to do so. In the field of musical rhetorical criticism, I would be encouraged to one day see this theory explored and applied.

In the process of conducting these analyses, I have come to realize that, in addition to being masterful works of art, mad rhetorics also feature a labyrinthine quality. For example, when we examine the earlier descriptions of the narrator's journey to the house, the "lair-like" abode of Zann, and the general sense of anxiety demonstrated by the main characters, we see a progression of the tale's action straight to its mad rhetorical center: Zann's music. Because mad rhetorics wrap radically creative ideas in the form recognizable to others, I wonder if they ultimately become as bread trails that draw the reader through a series of mazelike constructions to the final radical creativity at their center. Further research in this theory might attempt to discern whether this particular analogy

may lead to the development of mad rhetorical theory-specific analytical tools and rubrics.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAD RHETOR AS MODEL FOR MAD RHETORIC

Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of a Troubled Artist

Of the three mad rhetors I have chosen to analyze in

this paper, Vincent Van Gogh is perhaps the one most

associated in the public eye with mental illness. Van Gogh

certainly suffered from various psychological maladies that

left him at times debilitated, delusional, depressed to the

point of self-mutilation, and in the throws of various

substance abuse problems for much of his adult life

(Anderson, 1994). However, his creative brilliance cannot

be denied. In a very short period of time, Van Gogh was

able to leave a lasting mark on the world of art,

specializing in elevating real-world scenarios to a higher

plateau of meaning. His brilliant colors, innovative

brushstrokes, and, most of all, his dynamic ability to

identify the characteristics of everyday life that obscure

something greater, are all hallmarks of his work that have

inspired artists to this day. Still, I have not chosen to

analyze one of Van Gogh's incredible outdoor scenes or

still lives (any of which could have been a candidate for

analysis as a mad rhetoric) but a self-portrait that I

believe functions as a mad rhetoric. In this examination of the *Self-Portrait, September 1889,* I will show how Van Gogh communicates one of the rarest forms of radical creativity: the mad rhetor showing us his mad rhetorical visage through his mad rhetoric.

This kind of mad rhetorical self-portrait attempts an incredibly complex psychological-artistic transfer. By offering the artist's portrait as one others can appreciate in a recognizable form while also capturing his own mad rhetorical personality in a single image, Van Gogh presents a kind of bifurcated image that is unique to this kind of mad rhetoric. The self-portrait of a mad rhetor hints at its own mad rhetorical nature at a sublime level without breaking the overall constitution of the portrait that allows it to signify the "self-portrait" trope. A mad rhetor creating such a mad rhetoric is forced to engage in an unbelievably phantasmagorical experience, for they must compress a representation of themselves engaging in the strenuous mad rhetorical artistic process into a code that can be expressed in a single image that others will be able to follow while not missing its esthetic function as an appreciable work of self-portraiture. Critics of these special kinds of mad rhetorics are thus tasked with

identifying them both as appreciable works of self-portraits and as works of mad rhetoric, the later of which is demonstrated by the ways in which the artist expands the form of the self-portrait to indicate the presence of their mad rhetorical visage.

While the mad rhetorical critic is limited only to criticizing that which he can find within a mad rhetoric, the general process of all mad rhetors of this form can be discussed openly with total accuracy. Returning to the theoretical writings of Julia Kristeva (2002), we can see that this kind of creative activity takes considerable willpower, for it requires the artist to abject not only their ego-driven persona into a rhetorical situation, but also the singular unique state of their mad rhetorical "flow" onto the canvas. This makes for a devastating departure for the spirit of the artist, making each work of this kind an incredible singular achievement of creative Othering if it succeeds in being appreciable by others. Not only does the artist have to produce an image of themselves that is in line with their creative tradition's established ideal of the "self-portrait," they must also establish a pattern which allows viewers to recognize their mad rhetorical state. If we see the mad rhetorical state as

bearing similarities to a Csikszentmihalyian "flow" episode (1997), then we can understand the difficulties the artist experiences in attempting to produce an image that captures a "one-time" state that requires intense focus in order to reproduce. The mad rhetor in this situation attempts to show both themselves and the "more" of themselves that represents their mad rhetorical state without sacrificing the work's quality or material integrity. In the case of this painting, Van Gogh was also forced to confine his efforts to using the form of the "self-portrait" as it is most often presented prior to the 20th Century; this style consisting only of a relatively static representational form that forced artists attempting the complex feat of producing a mad rhetorical self-portrait to be just as radically innovative as they were radically creative.

As a critic who recognizes these issues, I conjecture that the best methodology I have available to my effort is to attempt to qualify this painting in terms of its rhetorical functions. Because I am attempting to show how this painting first grounds itself as a work of self-portraiture that is appreciable by others and then as a mad rhetoric by demonstrating how it incorporates radically creative designs to offer a secondary identity as a self-

portrait of a mad rhetor is his mad rhetorical state, I have employed Foss's (1994) visual schema to offer a deductive breakdown of functions of the core image followed by a heuristic analysis of the ways in which Van Gogh hints at his expansion of that image into a mad rhetorical self-portrait. I have also included relevant comments Van Gogh made about the production of this painting and on art in general. Furthermore, I have consulted a number of works on color theory to help bolster my arguments regarding the painting's aesthetics. By analyzing the tools that Van Gogh had access to in the creation of his mad rhetoric, I will thus demonstrate how he was able to present such his dualistic, mad rhetorical image in the painted form.

Initial Impressions of the Portrait

I believe this painting functions primarily as a testament to a tortured artist married to his radically creative state. This is a classical portrait in that it is neither completely abstract (ala Dali) or representational one (ala Picasso). We see an incredibly intense soul peering out at us through this self-portrait that belies an emotional-psychological blueprint. We see that it is in fact Van Gogh presenting his blueprint of his visage as a

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mad rhetor. This is a painting by the artist that depicts a state of himself that seethes beyond his physical being into something greater: his unraveled mad rhetorical aura. At first glance, I am immediately confronted with the intense melancholy of the figure. My eyes are drawn almost immediately to the frown upon the artist's face, an expression that seems to reach beyond the general sternness that many individuals of that era adopted when sitting for a portrait. With this tight-lipped grimace, I am immediately clued into the figure's dejected emotional state, a capture that is further accented by his morose eyes. One of these light-blue orbs looks at me with resignation while another cocks away in a fashion that seems to depict a forlorn state. While his beard and hair are kept up, they are by no means in a perfect state of grooming. His hair is pulled back and greasy, while his beard is overgrown in some areas and has bald patches. The artist's skin is pale and lined with a sickly pallor. His clothes, while formal and not slovenly in appearance, are by no means perfectly outfitting his body. Even his posture denotes a general sense of estrangement with its dropping shoulders and concave chest.

While deeply invested with psychological gravitas, the figure is never the less to my eyes a functionally complete portrait. Importantly, as a work of art, I don't believe it needs to ever be cited as a mad rhetoric, for as a self-portrait it is a work of genius. Van Gogh's painting is as powerful as any his fellow Dutch Master Rembrandt produced, and it exploits the same direct representational style as Rembrandt's own self-portraits. It also fits nice into the continuity of style featured in Van Gogh's other portraits and self-portraits as a painting of a solitary, singular figure painted in a highly evocative manner. In short, the focused portrait style used follows a tradition dating back to the Roman era that seeks to glorify the subject as they might ideally be seen. It is not an abstract attempt to capture a singular essential element of the figure, nor is it so overloaded with particulars that distract from the accomplishment of its goal. It is invested with emotion, to be sure, but it is not stranded in a sea of pathos unable to relate to the common viewer. It is, therefore, a portrait that is directly comprehensible by the casual viewer and thus a candidate for classification as a mad rhetoric.

Van Gogh's Innovative Use of Color

Once we move beyond the human figure itself, however, we begin to see something more going on in the painting than the rigors of standard, "realistic" self-portraiture. First, the color blue plays a dominate role throughout the painting's construction. Classically, the color blue denotes moods of depression (among other emotional states) (Gage, 2000; Pastoureau, 2001) and thus is continuous with the character's expression and general demeanor. Blue bleeds into the figure's hair, skin, clothes, and face, making the color part of his physical being. The other prominent color in the painting is red, which most notably marks the figure's various hair strands. While the figure is a self-portrait of the redheaded Van Gogh, the contrast between these two primary colors lends a clashing and discursive flavor to the whole composition. An argument could be made that these two colors make up a seeming complimentary pointillist matrix, a style that Van Gogh had used before and was quite familiar with (Connelly, 2000). To this argument, I would say that the colors are not the orange and blue that make up a complimentary color couplet, but are instead more severely contrasted shades of red and blue. While there is a significant amount of orange in Van

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Gogh's red hair, I argue that these pigments make the red all the more pronounced (as would a slight green tint do for a blue scheme). Notably, the only naturally blue part of Van Gogh's physical being was his light blue eyes, and this attribute hints that the artist's eye color dominates his appearance over his sanguine hair pigment. Alternately, the beard color brings a certain extremity to his face vis-à-vis red's close association in the human mind with violence and blood (Gage, 2000).

In addition to the metaphors of violence and melancholy these two colors connote, they also share meanings in the tropic sphere of elementalism (Pastoureau, 2001). The color blue has a direct link to the classical element of water, the phlegmatic humor that is associated with the brain, tranquility, femininity, and mutability (Gage, 2000). Red is directly linked with the element of fire, the bilic humor associated with the heart (as well as blood), energy, masculinity (appropriate as the beard's color), and destruction (Finlay, 2003). From the elemental perspective, these two colors are diametrically opposed, making their prominent presence within the painting stark. Van Gogh was known to be a great lover of the philosophies and art of both the east and the west, so it is probable

that he understood both the mystical and psycho-

metaphorical qualities of both colors (Hughes, 1994).

Shapes and Colors Transform the Figure

To return to the significance of the artist's blue

eyes, it is notable that they are not the only eye-like

shape depicted in the painting. The top button on the

jacket of the artist bears a strong resemblance to an eye

itself. While I don't know if that particular jacket in

fact had such a button as a matter of coincidence, it

certainly lends the painting an extra-ocular influence.

Other instances of eye-like shapes can be found in the

swirling patterns above the figure's head and to the left

of the eyeline. Notably, these designs are very similar to

those found in another painting of that period, *Starry

Night* (1889). Van Gogh was a rampant experimenter, and

these swirls, while deep with meaning in their ocular

fashion, were also a design motif included in many of the

artist's paintings of this period (Gruitrooy, 1994). This

preponderance of eyes and the dominance of the color blue

serves only to draw my attention back to the artist's eyes

with their expressions of intensity and depression. If, as

the cliché goes, the "eyes are the window to the soul,"

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then this strange cyclical configuration of blue through the painting suggests that the soul of the artist transcends his being into an existence at a larger, atmospheric level. To expand on this premise, we can see how the color blue is elementally appropriate, for it suggests that the artist is, in fact, painting himself as a being of transcendent, uncontainable intellect. That greater-than-human aspect of the painting is what makes it a construct of iconography and not merely self-portraiture; therefore, I am able to note that this is a portrait of this mad rhetor seeing himself in his supra-personal mad rhetorical state.

The transcendent nature of the figure in the painting is not merely a matter of the crafty use of pigment. Van Gogh was fond of using wavy lines and curvature in his paintings to accent particular parts of the overall creation for dramatic effect (Gruitrooy, 1994). Here we see perhaps the most invasive and transcendental use of that style in the portrayal of a human figure. The portrait is a relatively stable and representational creation, but Van Gogh invests the painting with just enough of these wavy and spiraling brushstrokes to clue the viewer in to a subliminal subjective transformation of the figure. The

face makes up the part of the portrait that is least affected by this particular movement, but there are circumstances within the skin's texture that contain these characteristic traits. Underneath the eyes can be found a number of erratic wrinkle lines. These lines are completely contained within the construction of the face; thus, they are not truly waved like the lines that can be found in the upper left portion of the forehead. These inner lines suggest the outer lines, but are distinct from them as well. Just as these two portions of skin contrast with each other, the figure's facial hair is not as curvilinear as its head-hair. The head-hair bridges the gap between the outer-leading partially curvilinear skin and the fully swirling background that surrounds the body. The head-hair still retains a directional flow that shows a certain sense of purposeful maintenance, but its semi-wild designs strongly hint at the chaos that lies just beyond it.

These disjunctive line accents are even more present in the figure's clothes. The jacket retains its cut and shape, but its interior is riddled with fluid and curving folds. It is not a coincidence that the jacket is similar in color to the background, for it contains some of the same curving patterns in dual hues on a contained corpus.

The makeup of the clothes suggests to me that the artist is showing himself cloaked in the fabric of the chaos that surrounds him, an immediate and controlled owned barrier that both allies itself with that chaos and protects against its own consumption. This is the mad rhetor representing his ability to "wear" his mad rhetoric, a solid fabric constructed of his radical creativity (the metaphysical "entity" which is primarily represented by the background). Again, I take note of Van Gogh's subliminal genius as he infuses his portrait's comprehensible form with a pattern recognizable when analyzed from the proper perspective.

The Background Makes the (Radically Creative) Man

The swirling background, painted with significantly more spacious strokes than the other elements of the painting, is both enchanting and ethereal. Streams of heat seem to evaporate off the figure's person, twirling into eyes and strands of twisting whimsy. The complete informality of these strokes contrasts with the grave look on figure's head, suggesting that what once looked like the serious gaze of a downtrodden man can also be interpreted as a look of extreme concentration in the wake of this

distorting aura. From this perspective, this effort turns the figure's look of discomfort into a heroic effort to maintain his intellectual composure as he stands immersed in all the disquietude of these projections. Even more germane to my argument, however, is to say that this look is equally as likely to be the face worn by the artist in his attempt to concentrate long enough to authentically reproduce his visage as a representation of himself in his mad rhetorical state. Those atmospheric waves, in this reading, are the weaving strands of radical creativity that can only be figuratively simulated in the corpus of a painted self-portrait. Again, these swirling motifs can also be found in Van Gogh's arguably more famous work the *Starry Night* (1889) in the form of twinkling stars in the night sky. Van Gogh seemed to be experimenting with these swirls at the time, as the two paintings were created within months of each other. While *Starry Night* could be arguably be considered a mad rhetoric in its own right, the use of what appear to be similar figures differs completely when taken in the context of their greater work. Where one painting projects outward bodies as they are perceived by an earthbound artist, the other shows up in the background of a work focused inwardly on the artist's visage.

The Art Realized and the Message Conveyed

The schema I am using to analyze this painting prescribes as its third process of assessment a judgment of the legitimacy of the choices made by the painter in the creation of his work. This analysis is meant to access the painting's success in communicating the message that brought my critical attention. By definition, any mad rhetoric is a precedential and unique creation, so it is difficult to compare its qualities to a proper survey of similar works that share its level of complexity. This conclusion jibes somewhat with Foss' (1994) suggestion that a visual rhetoric can be compared to others of its kind, so I am sidestepping this stipulation as I feel it is not as important to what I am trying to demonstrate. That said, I propose that a more effective strategy can be utilized that keeps with the spirit of this section of Foss' schema. I believe Van Gogh's compelling use of original strategies and imagery within the painting offers a strong proof of the painting's cultural legitimacy. After analyzing the painting's design, I believe I can argue that these same techniques are used to incorporate Van Gogh's mad rhetoric element into the larger rhetorical form of the "self-portrait."

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The Life of the Troubled Genius Vincent Van Gogh

Looking back at the life of this troubled, but brilliant, artist offers some clues to his incredible talent and skills as a visionary. Dutch in origin, Van Gogh's family was filled with artists and Christian evangelism pastors (Connelly, 2000), so it's comes as little surprise that Vincent had a life-long interest in both subjects. As an adult, Van Gogh found early work as a dealer in art at one of his relative's firms, but he soon drifted closer to pursuing the life of a clergyman (Gruitrooy. 1994). Rejecting the business of art for its crass commerciality, and having little success in performing salesman duties, Van Gogh began a lifelong dependence on the assistance of family members to support his various passions (Anderson, 1994). Young Van Gogh's life was filled with professional, social, and emotional calamity, but the raw determinism to pursue his love of art-making, once he discovered it, never left him in light of later troubles. Constantly drawing studies and learning from other painters, Van Gogh's style evolved into a complex combination of light, color, and expressionistic interpretation of his subject matter. His palate shifted over his career from earth tones to the radiant spectrum he

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was known for in his later works, just as his style cycled through periods of imitation to experimentation to groundbreaking individual achievement (Anderson, 1994). Upon assuming a position with his ever-supportive brother Theo in the Parisian art gallery Goupil & Cie (where the later worked), Van Gogh became fascinated by the Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist artists that were taking the contemporary art scene by storm. When not studying current painters, Van Gogh focused on mastering the art of previous generations. He was also fascinated with the work of Asian artists, and was known to keep and reference various reproductions of Japanese word prints from time to time (Connelly, 2000). Like some of his contemporaries, Van Gogh was an undocumented scholar of the field who enjoyed discussing topics in art with other experts (Gruitrooy. 1994). In friendship, outside of his brother and the painter Gauguin, Van Gogh had few close friendships, although many found him a passionate equal and an admirable painter. He was a known member of the artistic, bohemian culture at the time, growing to know the artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (who drew a pastel of Van Gogh) and Émile Bernard among others (Connelly, 2000).

While Van Gogh's artistic worth grew in leaps and bounds, his fortunes in life sunk again and again. He came to use absinthe later in his life, finding the drink both exhilarating and illuminating. It is not known what effect this drink had on him physically, but it was surely detrimental to his ability to function at times (Gruitrooy. 1994). He rarely ate well, he smoked, and he is thought to have suffered from a number of sexually-transmitted diseases over the years (Gruitrooy. 1994). For all of his intellectual prowess and artistic talent, Van Gogh often found himself sick because of this ragged lifestyle. All of these issues lead Theo Van Gogh (as well as the rest of the artist's family) to constant worry over Van Gogh's health. When not directly supporting him, Theo asked others to watch over the artist a number of times because of Van Gogh's lack of concern over his personal effects (Anderson, 1994). First Gauguin became a sponsored partner and custodian of sorts, and later Van Gogh was admitted to a series of mental and medical health care facilities.

Van Gogh began to exhibit a truly rash and radical disregard for his physical well-being late in his life, the first instance of which found him cutting himself with a razor when stalking Gauguin. The aftermath of this incident

found him sent to a hospital for treatment of his wounds.

Soon enough, Van Gogh began to suffer hallucinations, a

bout of demented paranoia that was used as grounds to have

him committed to the mental hospital of Saint-Paul-de-

Mausole in Saint Rémy de Provence (Connelly, 2000). It was

here that Van Gogh began some of the most inspired and

famous work in his life, and it was also here that he

painted the self-portrait that I analyzed here (Van Gogh,

1889).

Toward the end of his life, Van Gogh was beginning to

receive some critical recognition for his work, especially

from other painters, although he wasn't able to sell much

of anything (Anderson, 1994). In truth, he seemed to fear

success, or at least the ill fortune he believed it brought

artists (Van Gogh, 30 April 1890/2003). Albert Aurier

called him a genius and Monet named his work the best of a

show that he participated in (Artistes Indépendants in

Paris). He was not without his detractors, however, as his

work was insulted by a member of the avant-garde Parisian

painter's association at their annual exhibition.

Regardless, Van Gogh's health continued to decline and he

began to see a doctor regularly. There were some indicators

that Van Gogh was in the process of a recovery before his

death (Connelly, 2000; Van Gogh, 1853-1890/2003), however his fluctuating nature might have made these various observations by himself and others dubious. His depression seems to have sealed his fate, for after returning to Saint Rémy, Van Gogh fatally wounded himself with a shotgun in a field at the age of 37.

One Artist's Love of Communication

Van Gogh's letters reveal much of his opinion of his own artistic ability. He felt himself a qualified artist, although his opinion of his artwork was regularly self-critical. He related, in a letter to His mother from Saint-Rémy, that he felt artists were compelled to paint (Van Gogh, 20-22 October 1889/2003). He related to his brother that he felt he was lesser than a peasant, an abstract he thought he resembled in appearance. Van Gogh seemed to regret the trouble he caused his family, lamenting the "silliness" of his craft in a letter to his brother Theo (Van Gogh, 25 October 1889/2003).

Van Gogh commented that he once in a letter to his sister Wilhelmina felt that his art deserved simple presentation (Van Gogh, 20-22 October 1889/2003). Indeed, despite the intricacy of his paintings, Van Gogh said he

strove for simplicity in his art, using simple tones and colors to achieve effects (to Wilhelmina, Van Gogh, 20-22 October 1889/2003). This may have stemmed from a desire to establish the visual order that was denied him during some of his more disorienting attacks of mental illness. Still, his paintings were never what one might consider "simple." Of his portfolio, Van Gogh was reluctant to label his work as part of a movement, finding labels "absurd" and "frightening" (Connelly, 2000).

He knew that many considered him a sick man. He was concerned that his paintings might be interpreted as the work of the infirm, but he commented that they he did not intend them to bare any such mark (to Wilhelmina van Gogh, Van Gogh 10 December 1889/2003). As to his own mental strength and the fate of artists, Van Gogh was of two minds. He felt focus was paramount to productive activity in the arts, but admitted he was very absent minded despite himself (To Anna Van Gogh,20 December 1889/2003). He said he felt that this trait might be endemic to artists who are tasked with an intense visual comprehension of their surroundings and thus are often caught unaware by other parts of their life.

In regard to the self-portrait I have chosen to analyze, Van Gogh, in a letter to his brother (To Theo, Van Gogh, 5-6 September 1889/2003) remarked that he had used himself as a model "for want of another (one)." He was as self-critical of his self-portraiture as he was with everything else, stating in the same letter that "it is difficult to know oneself - but it isn't easy to paint oneself either." Still, he felt the painting was a strong fit to his development in that style, commenting that it was "a lot of trouble to do." This may also hint at the strain he underwent in creating this mad rhetoric. He also felt that the painting showed him in greater health then ever, and perhaps more to the point, "saner." He felt that the art of portraiture left long-lasting testaments to the world of art. He reported he felt an "urge" to produce more portraits, although these urges seem to have been placed aside for the most part in favor of other pursuits in the short time before his suicide. Regardless of this later calling, the fact that Van Gogh professed to be saner, healthier, and more passionate as an artist proves that this mad rhetor did not come from the weakness of mental illness. This is man attempting the Herculean act of trying to understand himself and, moreover, show that image to the

viewer through his work. While there are no available records of Van Gogh's process in creating this exact painting beyond his confessions in his letters, we can assume that he found the process the masterful challenge all mad rhetorics are to produce.

It is my assertion that Van Gogh was able to capture himself as a mad rhetor through his employment of a mad rhetorical element in the painting's design. It is my contention that only a master of his caliber could depict the abstract nature of the mad rhetor in his mad rhetorical state while simultaneously presenting a brilliant figurative self-portrait that most viewers can appreciate. I believe it is important to point out that this painted rhetoric need only work on this second level to remain a work of esthetic brilliance; that Van Gogh was able to provide cryptic clues in its patterns, strokes, and colors toward a greater meaning exposes his success in communicating a mad rhetoric. That Van Gogh has left the clues to this alternate statement in his work that I as a critic am able to locate and assess proves its functional legitimacy. In short, when it comes to assigning "hidden" meanings to works of rhetoric, I can conclude that if any other observer is able to legitimately identify a visual

rhetoric as a work of creation that includes a mad

rhetoric, then this is proof enough of the successful

communication of that mad rhetoric. This aspect of the

creation's design thus need only reach a distinct audience

to succeed as a mad rhetoric.

A Work Criticized, a Mad Rhetoric Qualified

In my criticism of this work, I have therefore been

able to demonstrate how the painting works both as a

profound self-portrait and as a mad rhetoric capturing the

visage of a mad rhetor. By using this familiar form of

painting, Van Gogh is able to offer the viewer a complete

artistic experience while also granting those who search

the painting for deeper meaning an altered vision of the

painting's subject. By utilizing interloping color schemes

and suggestive brushstrokes, Van Gogh was able to expand

the artistic field in a radical way that has influenced

many future successful artists. By suggesting a dislocation

of the solidity of his persona through the incorporation of

the color blue, Van Gogh was able to communicate the

precedential idea that a singular part of his personality--

- his mind as represented through his blue eye--- could

seep beyond his physical person to define his presence. By

allowing a part of his visage to define this greater

persona, Van Gogh was able to effectively mask a hidden

transformation of his being through a procession of

different stages (the clothes, his expression, the aura,

etc.). It is a work of art that works on the physical, the

metaphorical, and the psychological levels of meaning, each

of which is partitioned only by the viewer's capacity to

familiarize themselves with its topographical being. This

is a visual mad rhetoric that establishes a unique and

radical connection between Van Gogh and the viewer on their

individual level of comprehension. As a painting, it was an

abstraction to Van Gogh and it is an abstract to us, but

its mad rhetorical nature allows it to communicate a vision

of the artist in his own personal state of radical

creativity.

<div align="center">Beyond Van Gogh: Searching for Other
Self-Portraits of Mad Rhetors</div>

In addition to featuring labyrinthine qualities that

link the reader through the maze of the mad rhetoric to the

rhetor's radically creative idea, I believe mad rhetorics

can also take on, in form, qualities of a tesseract in

certain specific cases such as a mad rhetorical self-

portrait. A tesseract is a cube that has been cubed, or a fourth dimensional hypercube that bends its own planes onto itself from the three-dimensional viewpoint. The mad rhetorical self-portrait seems to be a mad rhetoric looking at a mad rhetoric and a mad rhetoric within a mad rhetoric. It constantly shifts one's focus from an identity that is recognizable as work of self-portraiture to its identity that is a mad rhetoric and back again. Like an unconscious optical illusion, it is both identities and transmits both meanings in unending, dizzying conjunction. It is a form that establishes a new vista for its particular mode of creation, the mad rhetorical personality actively stretching the format by dynamically envisioning itself.

Being a relatively unique creative endeavor among unique creative endeavors, it is difficult to guess how many mad rhetorical self-portraits could actually exist and the effect they had on their creative traditions. This work by Van Gogh, for all its complex idiosyncrasies, is a relatively direct production when one considers the possible forms a radically creative self-reflective self-extending work could take. We can assume that these kind of mad rhetorics are produced at far more dynamic levels than on the singular image found in the painted medium, although

paintings and other still imagery would seem to offer the most directly comprehensible form of this kind of rhetoric for the singular critic to focus on. These kind of rhetorics, in a sense, are made of the stuff of greatest masters of a particular form looking at themselves and using their own concept of themselves as a blueprint from which to expand human creative potential. This kind of rhetoric would be limited to the forms that others could appreciate as all mad rhetorics are, so I would venture to say that these mad rhetorics form only the most powerful image the artist wishes to expose publicly. Furthermore, a lack of these kinds of works might also be attributed to the fact that creative rhetors are tasked with producing their visions in ways others can appreciate, thus most may find an examination of themselves as a subject for public consumption not to be in their own best interest. However, those radical creators who are able to find within themselves as their own subject a *chora* that can produce a radically creative concept that others can appreciate as a mad rhetoric can pride themselves on completing a rarely paralleled creative maneuver.

If there is a critical framework that could identify the tesseract-like qualities of this specific kind of mad

rhetoric that could be created and disseminated, it is beyond my ability to comprehend at the time of this writing. It is possible that because this particular kind of mad rhetoric is so ego-driven, which is to say focused on one's own view of one's own persona, a critic in search of a reusable critical framework could draw heavily on prefabricated psychoanalytical critical approaches as well as criticism in the literature of abstract art. It is possible that there may be some analytical fruit to be found in such studies as a way to further understand how creative individuals innovate, however it may not be applicable to other situations. Mad rhetorical self-portraits are the closest one can come to imprinting one's own mad rhetorical personality onto another form of media, so they are also the forms of mad rhetoric that are most infused with psychological "footprints." Mad rhetorical critics in search of any form that was specific to this kind of creativity would have to be careful not to become involved in a psychological analysis of the creator when they should be remain fixated on the information contained strictly in final, produced form.

CHAPTER FIVE

ERASERHEAD: AN EXAMPLE OF A MAD RHETORIC IN FILM

Films offer one of the most complex rhetorical
environments for the application of the creative impulse.
They also offer one of the most complex rhetorical text
formats to assess and criticize because they work with so
many synchronized rhetorical channels. Sound, light, color,
and cinematography are just some of the myriad different
qualities of a picture that the critic can assess at the
technical level, and these preclude the more nuanced levels
of interpretation that look at such qualitative assessment
elements as performance, directorial choice, plot dynamics,
and editing choices. Critics of a particular film can
choose to analyze any one of these many elements to isolate
a particular technical choice on the part of the
directorial team or the performance of one particular
actor, but they must also provide a reason as to why they
chose to analyze that particular element and then show its
place within the corpus of a film by capturing the essence
of the film and that particular element's special
functional purpose to the overall work. The criticism of
mad rhetorics in media is no different, but this effort is

special in that this works to isolate the unique

contribution of one particular radically creative element

toward making this film a mad rhetoric.

I have chosen *Eraserhead* (Lynch, 1977/2006) as my

third mad rhetorical text to analyze because, in a sense,

it represents the most radically creative of the three I

have analyzed in this thesis. If Van Gogh's painting shows

a mad rhetor looking at himself and Lovecraft's story shows

the mad rhetor and his mad rhetoric inside a greater mad

rhetoric, these texts still present elements that can be

directly regarded by any reader of those works. They are

direct representations of personalities or objects within a

creative work, even as they distort them to achieve new

meanings for their creative genre--- as all mad rhetorics

do. The mad rhetoric in *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) is not

apparent at all through the entire run of the film, because

it is radically creative at the structural level. The film

succeeds as a work of creative genius at its apparent,

narrational level, but within that story lies a hidden

structural code that presents an entirely different level

of meaning. Each of the characters, plot lines, and

background locations and sets in the film make up

particular pieces in the "map" of this secondary structural

meaning, but without ever stating themselves as such. The greatest hint that the audience receives regarding the existence of this secondary level of meaning is the title of the film and the scene that shows that name's origin. The presence of this secondary meaning is radically creative in that it appears to have no precedent in film. Many films offer implications regarding particular characters and situations that extend beyond their presence in the film, but these insights are tied more directly to the element or character that denotes them. *Eraserhead* deforms from the three-dimensional representation of character and plot on the screen to a sub-dimensional level of extreme figurative meaning wherein each characteristic and character makes up a mechanical part that integrates into the function of the complete subject of the structure and its plot-driven story progression. In short, Lynch's film is not just about the dystopian existence of Henry Spenser; it is about the inner-world of the mind of a person dying of a brain tumor.

Because both levels of the film are interlinked, this analysis necessitates that I first proved a diegesis of the plot's progression so that I might latter demonstrate how the figures in that plot and what occurs in that plot

correlate with each other. This diegesis also affords my

analysis a deeper report of its meaning at its "face

level," and thus why the film is such an inspired vehicle

in which to place the mad rhetoric that lies beneath its

surface. Although this is Lynch's first feature-length

film, it is also one of the purest statements to the genius

work that has inspired many filmmakers since.

David Lynch and his Warped Style

The dystopias that form a continuous theme in David

Lynch's films are American Dystopias, surreal visions

viewed through the kaleidoscope of the promise of "Morning

in America" (Lynch was an avid admirer of Ronald Reagan)

where "homegrown values" wither before the harsh realities

of progress and an increasing feeling of alienation from

our fellows as the "American World" crushes dreams into a

universal model of Otherness (Nochimson, 1997). In a sense,

Lynch offers a subtle critique of what Debord might

identify as the "American version" of his Spectacle (1995).

Lynch's radically creative *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) reviles

the baseness of this commodification of the human

enterprise and yet wonders at the ironic, horrific beauty

it has wrought (although this theme is more prevalent in

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his later films) (Jameson, 2003). It is this wonder and emotional retreat that makes Lynch's major protagonists so intriguing, for they are, nearly to a number, relative innocents confronted with events and people who betray and tempt their better natures (Johnson, 2004).

Just as much as they are explorations of human emotion and cognitive anarchy, so too are Lynch films studies of the surreal nature of his characters' surroundings (Chion, 2006). Indeed, it is hard to think of a director who exhibits more careful intent in the construction of his sets (some of which he has personally crafted and decorated) and his choices of scenery. Lynch's backgrounds are crafted to the point where they become just as much part of his scripts as any spoken word (Woods, 2000). Sounds, colors, textures, fashions and even smells and tastes are always integral elements of Lynch's work. From the gray wastelands of *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) to the donut shops of *Twin Peaks* (1990) to the grimy alleys of the *Elephant Man* (1980), Lynch's sense-based images of set and location bleed into each other, demanding equal billing with the characters themselves (Chion, 2006). Whether these clashing textures represent the surreal nature of his work or the hyper-reality that is his Platonic vision of the

true nature of existence is hard to say, but Lynch films demand critical absorption and attention or the viewer risks losing the viewer completely any sense of receptiveness to the extent of estrangement (Woods, 2000).

In a Lynch film, composition and texture are just as much elements of the production as are the performances of the actors or the impact of the soundtrack (Woods, 2006). In many ways, Lynch's films work as mobile still life studies that stream through a plot, not unlike a series of dynamic frescos might run through an animated slideshow reel. This metaphor and his focus on dystopian societies are "guiding insights" into the radical creativity of this filmmaker.

The Morality of an Idealistic Misanthrope

There is another theme that runs throughout all of Lynch's work, which is as much a transposed mark of the filmmaker's character as are the marks of his radical creativity. Lynch seems to display a fascination or even a passion for exploring the concept of loneliness and spiritual solitude (Johnson, 2004). Lynch's characters, by and large, are studies in disaffection and disenfranchisement, each suffering through existential

experiences that make their presence within the surreal worlds that Lynch creates trials of their character. Yet yet they are not so much suffering as reaching states of lucid distraction. Lynch's films are paced to this "lonely-life" progression, taking the time for the characters to experience multiple motifs of neurotic isolation as they radiate into and out of one another's social stratospheres. An example of this kind of "dance bizarre" is the affair between Jeffrey Beaumont and Dorothy Vallens in *Blue Velvet* (1986), with the young man and the femme fatale alternately coming together and falling away. In this way, Lynch's movies aren't so much nihilistic as fatalistic, with stories where heroes are defined by how they survive their surroundings and how they adapt to the choices Lynch forces them to make (Nochimson, 1997). Some are tragic, like the Elephant Man; others are stoic, like Special Agent Dale Cooper; while still others, like Henry Spenser, are merely complacent and damned because of that ennui.

Lynch is a filmmaker who, despite his love of dark themes, is fundamentally fascinated by a hope for moral action (Johnson, 2004). Moral characters in his movies are the true heroes. To Lynch, those who are able to remain faithful to some ideal, despite often-desperate and

nihilistic surroundings and events have, in the end, proven

their social mettle. Lynch, ever the Eagle Scout, shows a

discernable faith in the honor of moral deeds. While his

worlds are fated, he demands his heroes meet that fate

righteously or suffer breakdowns because of it (Johnson.

2004). In this sense, Lynch is perhaps the most classical

of modern Hollywood filmmakers, just as he is also one of

the most artistically deviant.

Finally, duality also plays a major part in Lynch's

works, most presently in relation to his characters.

Whether in *Mulholland Drive* (2001), where the actors

themselves portray different characters that may or may not

have a spiritual connection; or in *Twin Peaks* (1990) where

each major character has a doppelganger persona; or in *Lost

Highway* (1997) where characters morph so radically between

opposed personalities; Lynch constant shifts between dual

realities that mark the "fugue-like" narratives. Characters

who inhabit Lynch's worlds are almost constantly bedeviled

by various murky elements within themselves that correspond

to extreme good and evil impulses (Cole, 2006). Just as the

outside backdrops in Lynch films seem to shift along with

vibrant characters, so too do the internal and often

unconscious developments of his character's souls. This

dual structures lends all of Lynch's work a psycho-mechanical quality.

Reception to *Eraserhead*: The Film that Introduced Lynch's Warped Worlds

The film *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) is Lynch's first feature length film; it is also his most raw and enigmatic. Dialogue in the film is sparse. Although based off of an unused earlier text called *Gardenback* that dealt with somewhat similar themes of adultery, the final film as shot was so avant-garde in 1977 that it was considered nearly un-releasable. Produced on an extremely tight budget supplied primarily by an American Film Institute grant (the institution Lynch was attending to receive for training as a director), loans from supporters and even the director's paper route money, *Eraserhead* still managed to achieve some level of technically brilliant production (Lynch, 2005). The film was shot and edited over a seven-year period with significant breaks. Lynch filmed exclusively on sections of the AFI campus in Los Angeles. Lynch, members of his film crew, and even his actors all assisted in producing and securing the flats, costumes, and props employed in filming according to Lynch's DVD commentary (1977/2006). Many of

these sundries were bought at deep discount from the closing sale of a feature film studio or were borrowed from a connection one of Lynch's academic advisors established with the Warner Brothers Studios prop department (Kaletta, 1992). The availability of these high-quality materials had the effect of lending the low-budget film a professionally defined look that otherwise would have been difficult to achieve due to a lack of funding. Due to the extended and intermittent shooting schedule, the film's props and background had to be reassembled and dissembled numerous times before the final film was produced. Because this forced Lynch to become one of the movie's constant designers, he was able to establish an intimate connection with the assembled sets that few high-budget film directors ever can (Lynch, 2005). As a result, nearly every element of *Eraserhead* carries Lynch's distinct, physical maker's mark, a achievement few other directors could claim.

Perhaps one of the most enigmatic pieces of the film's props was the baby-thing itself. Lynch has refused to divulge his techniques in the fabrication of the small, reptilian-like creature, so researchers are only able to conclude through observation that Lynch used puppetry and limited animatronics to make its individual parts seem

alive (Kaleta, 1992). Although not technically a prop, the soundtrack to the film also bears some mention for the stark cacophony it adds to the whole picture, leaving audiences with a near constant, damning auditory ambience that haunts the listener's ear just as much as it seems to haunt the film's characters. He uses ambient sound as a way to convey the constant horror of an industrial, claustrophobic nightmare-like setting as a heartbeat of sorts for an omnipresent, unseen monster.

This world is thus the creation of Lynch alone. It is a portent of the fabulous career that lay before him, but it is also his most deeply vivid film. Lynch called the film "my Philadelphia story" (Lynch, 2005) because it reminded him so much of an uncomfortable season living in that often-clogged, industrialized city. It also reminded him of his struggles as a young father. Despite its dark themes, it is also a film loaded with bizarre scenes that convey Lynch's quirky sense of humor. Putting it perhaps better than anyone else, the director himself stated in an interview with Rolling Stone, "It's hopefully not about one thing" (Lynch in Breskin, 1990, September).

Scholarly and Critical Reception to *Eraserhead*

I believe *Eraserhead* aligns itself with the surrealist and experimental film-making genre. In order for this film to be classifiable as a mad rhetoric, it must be appreciated by an audience and thus it must analyze it as a film attempting to appeal to a certain audience. Film as a medium appeals to many different senses, so analyses of their reception they receive are viably important to comprehending them; their forms of rhetorical communication are so dynamic. Film viewers today understand the medium enough to recognize the appeals filmmakers are making to them, as well as the style of film they are viewing. Filmgoers expect certain things from certain kinds of films and are fans of certain genres of filmmaking, so filmmakers endeavor to appeal to their viewers expectations. Understanding these appeals and understanding the receptive audience gives the critic insight into the choices filmmakers make in their films, and, in the case of the mad rhetorical filmmaker, even more demonstrations of their appellate qualities. By understanding the types of appeals they are making in the production of their film, we can understand the ways in which they wrap their mad rhetoric into a generic form viewers can understand and appreciate.

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I am using the research of Janet Staiger (1992, 2000) to access a number of categorizations that will allow me to clarify the specific kinds of cinematic appeals Lynch makes. Beyond the general audience, I have also cited a number of professional critics' analyses of the film as a way to access the "opinion-maker" level of popular reception.

In the years since its release, *Eraserhead* has occupied a rare place in cinematic history. It is the first salvo of a director who joined the ranks of John Waters and Peter Greenaway (among others) in creating a bizarre and visceral new style of cinema, as the critic Kenneth Kaleta (1992, pg.14) puts it. Debuting on March 19, 1977, in the Filmex show in Los Angeles and in fall of that year in New York, the film's initial run saw only a limited release in art house and independent theatres, an appropriate independent distribution (by Lynch directly) for a movie as abstract as it was at that time (Kaleta, 1992). Still it was this very audience that would go on to adopt the film as part of the midnight movie canon, giving it the same long run over the next 20 years that fellow "weird cinema" classics like Water's *Pink Flamingos* enjoyed. It never achieved a wide theatrical release.

One possible reason for difficulties in its interpretation is that the film appeals to different sensibilities at different times. As Staiger notes in *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (2000), scholars Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Timothy Corrigan present three distinct different historical divisions in ways in which films were received throughout the age of cinema. According to these scholars, viewer-spectators encounter a film from their eras with certain expectations for the conventions of the films of that era. Tom Gunning breaks up classic and modern cinema into the categories of "Cinema of Attraction" and the "Cinema of Narrative" and how the former becomes subsumed by the later (Staiger, 2000, pp. 13). In light of this framework, *Eraserhead* would appeal to viewer-spectators of either era at different levels. Viewers accustomed to the Cinema of the Narrative would find that *Eraserhead* opens a voyeuristic window into the enigmatic life of Henry Spenser, whose illusionary existence seems to jump at the audience as if they were experiencing a dream. Viewers used to the Cinema of Attraction would find that the film also confronts them with jolts of astonishment (the Baby, of the bleeding chicken, heads flying off shoulders, etc.) that

could force them to actively try to understand the mysterious meanings that underlie the bizarre action upon the screen. The film demands that observant viewers divine their own comprehension of the film's phantasmagorical scenes in the film that make very little literal sense. Beyond those idiosyncratic and singular analyses, this diverse film also asks that viewers produce their own ultimate meanings for an enigmatic conclusion that offers no concrete explanation or hints.

The critical framework for viewer-spectator analysis that Miriam Hansen (Staiger, 2000, p. 14) proposes seems slightly more germane to the appropriate analysis of this particular film. According to Hansen's schema for modern and post-modern film, *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) would be considered a post-modern film because its variety of short-term, stimulating scene-spectacles and its appeal to an "ideal" avant-garde public. As a string of patchwork fantasies that allude to its external temporal plot, *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) features an exposes world that warrants intertextual interpretations. Much like its brooding ancestors *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1921), Dali's *Un chien andalou* (1921), and Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932), *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) is brilliantly obtuse.

The third film scholar Timothy Corrigan breaks down various modes of cinematic address into three periods: pre-classical, modern, and post-modern cinema (Staiger, 2000, p. 16). Not surprisingly, his perspective would probably classify *Eraserhead* as a work of Post-Modern Cinema. This particular mode addresses unburdened and sporadic viewer accustomed to dealing with fragmented and often unintelligible narrative structures. What the viewer-spectator is accustomed to ib this kind of film is looking for a viewing experience that "says something," a demand that *Eraserhead* is quite able to comply with in its own bizarre fashion. Still, as this post-modern cinematic era begins in the 1970's, it is hard to imagine that the viewer in the frame of mind to enjoy this film's contemporary *Jaws* (1975) would experience the same amount of "entertainment value" out of *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) as they are fundamentally different kinds of film. In this way, *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) is a piece of post-modern cinema, but it doesn't easily lump itself into easy categorization among its brethren.

The key to using these analytical guides, as Staiger says, is to understand that "any individual viewer may engage even in the same theatergoing experience in these

various modes of reception" (pg. 21, 2000). Furthermore, as Staiger states, "no viewer is always one kind of spectator" (pg. 21, 2000). Once we understand that any film of any era can be viewed by the same viewers in different states of reception, it becomes clear that *Eraserhead's* (1977/2006) aberrant formula for rhetorical address can be appreciated by an audience fitting into any of the previously mentioned pre-classical, classical, modern, and post-modern eras. The modern spectator can understand the film at their own level, but they can also appreciate the film as the multi-generational cinematic creation Lynch intended it to be. Still, most moviegoers of every era have looked to films simply to be entertained and thus would probably prefer not to engage in the complex interpretation necessary for the enjoyment of the surreal *Eraserhead*. Hence *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) has always had a limited, cult audience made up of midnight movie buffs and appreciators of high-concept cinematic vision and it likely always will. As a mad rhetoric, this is a perfectly acceptable state of affairs, for a significant contingent of people can be said to truly appreciate the film.

Professional critics, as might be surmised, for the
most part loved the film. Contemporary *Village Voice* Film
Critic Nathan Lee reports in a January 17. 2007 article
that *Eraserhead* "scratched" his early film-watching
interest, going so far as to say that the film's "swarming
spermatozoa" instilled in him "a love of the avant-garde
that rapidly metastasized." Claiming he views the work as
one of "sculpture" today, Lee calls the film "a masterpiece
of texture, a feat of artesial attention, an ingenious
assemblage of damp, dust, rock, wood, hair, flesh, metal
and ooze." Still, no smaller critical source than the *New
York Times* in an October 17, 1990 review by Tom Buckley
panned the film, calling it "interminable" and "a murkily
pretentious shocker, an exercise in symbolism that owes a
good deal to *Le Chien Andalou* of Salvador Dali and Luis
Bunuel and to the ''nightmare' films going all the way back
to Georges Melies." It is possible that the film has grown
on reviewers over time as they have come to understand the
idiosyncrasies of what makes Lynch films culturally
relevant and not mere abstract pieces of absurdity.
Although still garnering its share of criticism to this
day, *Eraserhead* notably was deemed "culturally significant"
by the United States Library of Congress in 1994 and

selected for preservation in the prestigious National Film
Registry (Cole, 2006).

Heuristic Analysis of the Film

Dream a Damned Dream of Me

The first images that greet us in *Eraserhead* are of
the disembodied head of Henry cascading down the screen
with a look that betrays both angst and fear. We are
immediately made aware that this is not Henry in his
natural state not only because of his lack of shoulders,
but also because of an asteroid planet superimposed upon
his visage. Inside the planet dwells the Man in the Planet,
a seemingly deity-like workman figure who both observes and
reacts to the Henry-head by starting up his machine. The
machine snatches a worm that slips from Henry's open mouth
and casts it into a mud puddle.

Lynch confronts us very early on with the realization
that the world of the movie is a surreal environment. While
seemingly dreamlike, many of the elements of the "dream"
transfer over into the later "real" events that take place
in the story. The worms, for example, reappear in solid
form in the story and are handled by Henry, suggesting at
least a tangible significance for them. They are one of the

many enigmatic elements of Lynch's cinematic construct, as they at times seem to exhibit seminal qualities (their intrusion into many holes in the story, i.e. the mailbox, the cabinet, and the mud puddle) as well as symbolic representation of manifest sin (a characteristic best demonstrated in the way in which Henry covets and attempts to hide the worms). The workman Man in the Planet also reappears later on in the story without the presence of Henry, thus suggesting he is not merely a resident of Henry's dream but is instead a force that affects and reacts to Henry's actions.

Henry Hops Along in Hell

In the next scene in the film, we are introduced to the full-bodied Henry. We are immediately confronted with the bleakness of Henry's life. The world he lives in is a post-industrial wasteland, filled with unkempt grounds, dilapidated buildings, and the constant intrusion of vague but ominous sounds of industry. This ambient background sound is never addressed by the characters directly: it is not a realistic soundtrack as such, for it never fluctuates much in its slowly shifting monotony. In fact, the sounds lend the entire existence of Henry's world a feeling of persistent gloom and mechanized annihilation. As Henry is

an neo-Existentialist non-hero, these sounds appear to be the intangible manifestation of an uncaring machine-world grinding itself and everything in it into an untamed deconstruction. Tellingly, nearly the only things that are naturally alive in Henry's fill-bodied world are the humans themselves, as we never witness a living plant and only one animal (a dog and its suckling puppies in only two shots) are ever witnessed. Even the food of this world is false, with the characters being served "man-made" chicken, some onions and a single bowl of salad tossed by comatose hands.

The black-and-white film stock also lends a forbidding element to the story. By the film's release date, colored film stock was nearly the universal norm, so the decision to employ the older brand of celluloid was an artistic choice Lynch clearly made to lend effect to the story. While it is true that the film was made on an extremely low budget, Lynch had access to color film stock through his connection to AFI (Lynch, 2005). Viewers immediately notice the starkness of film, especially in the few outdoor scenes with their wider scope of contrasts. While other filmmakers have employed strained and bled-out techniques to emphasize surreal elements in their films, Lynch often utilizes clean shoots to capture his outdoor scenes. This preference sets

the disembodied Henry in the opening scenes in sharp

contrast with the enormous decay that stands around the

full-bodied Henry. There is a coarseness to black-and-white

film stock that pervades here, a graininess that befits the

post-industrial aspects of the background and merges with

the character's themselves. This supra-physical aspect of

the film makes it seem all the more surreal, a capture of a

false world with false residents.

As the focal character, Henry Spencer is creature that

seems just as abstract as his surroundings. Many physical

clues point to his base absurdity including his incredibly

protracted hair, his fumbling movements, and his shabby

clothing. Perhaps his most pronounced character trait is

his general air of complete discomfort, to the point where

Henry, in some of his more cagey moments, seems almost

animalistic. He seems more a creature of instinct than a

man capable of reason, shuffling through his life in

anticipation of some great incumbent doom soon to befall

him. He seems stuck in a state of eternal psycho-physical

stuttering. He seems both simultaneously numb to and

startled by the events taking place before him. While

neither he nor anyone else in the film reacts to or

mentions the music directly, Henry does seem to recognize

it viscerally, as he does his Orwellian surroundings. A statement Henry makes latter at the dinner with Mary's family sums up his existence perfectly: "I don't know much of anything." He doesn't know much of anything primarily because there is very little to know in this dream afterworld and certainly very little that warrants any consideration beyond its gray surface.

The building Henry lives befits his character, broken down with constant shorts of its various utilities and the general trappings of a flophouse. Although we witness and are told of communication that comes from without, Henry himself never directly connects with the outside world when he is in the building: his mailbox always remains empty of mail and no phone rings for him. He is summoned to Mary X's house by way of a relayed message from his Beautiful Girl Across the Hall, but no effort is made to directly reach him to confirm the delivery of the message. Henry is an abandoned man, as a later exchange between himself and Mary clearly shows (Henry to Mary: You never come around anymore). Even the window from his room faces an adjacent brick wall: a hopeless and isolating barrier. Inside his room, he has naught but the barest of drab furnishings, notably neither a TV or a radio, and most prominently his

huge iron cast bed. The only entertainment at all comes from a music box and a record player, both of which play bleak instrumental records. He is for the most part shut off from the world in this cell, an image that certainly explains the movie's alternate release title, *The Labyrinth Man*.

Henry Enters the Nest

If Henry seems like the surreal portrayal of the prototypical "lonely nerd," Mary X's family seems like the prototypical dysfunctional unit as interpreted by a Dadaist. Her father is happily clueless, her mother is a sinister "Mrs. Robinson-type" her grandmother is literally inert, and she is a protracted nervous wreck. Upon Henry's arrival to her summons, Mary immediately berates Henry for his absence, to which he replies that she herself has been absent from his side as well. This sets up, for the viewer, a highly caustic precedent for their relationship. Together they are a nightmare coupling, with Mary an unstable shrewish counterpoint to Henry's near complete ennui. Mary's parents immediately confront Henry, with her mother taking a demonstrably terse assessment of the young suitor. Henry responds to an inquiry by telling the family that he is a printer, but that he is on vacation. Bill X responds

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that he is a plumber, but that he suffers from problems with his limbs. It is notable that both men present themselves as derelict in the performance of their jobs. Henry states that he is on vacation, although the veracity of his employment is never confirmed because he is never shown working. Regardless of whether his career is real or phantasmal, he leaves it to others to promote his abilities, as Mary does to the scorn of Ms. X. The topic of what he prints or any information about his job other than a meaningless company name is never broached. After Bill X then happily chimes in that he is a plumber, although he says he is dismayed at the condition of the pipes that he has laid all over the town. We never actually see any evidence of Bill X's career either except for his name-tagged work shirt. To a certain extent, Bill X bodily suffers from "faulty pipes" as he shows signs of definite eccentricity. Just as broken as Henry as in a different way, Bill X fervently complains about his useless arm and, later, by his wife's advances on Henry that leave him cuckold.

The dinner scene that follows these introductions is
one of the two most visceral and most bizarre in the whole
film. When Mrs. X and Bill X retrieve the meal from a
kitchen, they exchange no dialogue in this space that
contains two stoves, a clock with only one hand, and the
grandmother, who is only seen in this kitchen, that seems
comatose. While we never learn if she is alive or not, her
daughter (in-law?) still lights a cigarette that she then
places in the motionless woman's mouth. Mother X then
forcibly mimics the assistance of the grandmother in
tossing a salad using her rigid hands. This room presents a
lot of interesting issues into the story without
significantly explaining any of them. It is possible that
it symbolizes the disconnect of this film and normal life,
being in essence a derelict model of the traditional 1950s
home environment that Lynch so identifies with.

Comparing Lynch's film and writing style to another
post-modern film director, Quinton Tarrantino, may shed
some light on its genuine uniqueness. Taking Tarrantino's
recent revenge opus *Kill Bill 2* as an example, Tarrantino
sets the character Sidewinder Budd (a former killer played
by tough guy actor Michael Madsen) up as a patsy before the
strip club manager he works for. It is arguable whether

this scene of emasculation is even called for by the logic of the narrative, although it features much of the incredibly stylized, tough dialogue that Tarrantino is known to slip into his films whenever he can. Regardless of whether it is needed, the audience can directly appreciate the ambience it lends to the picture, as it keeps with the style audiences have come to expect from the director. This scene in the kitchen gives no direct reason to be in the film in the manner it is. It appears to the viewer as a non sequitur of pure quirkiness that keeps with the surreal nature of the film but that doesn't affect the narrative development of Henry or even the Mother. Being a film by Lynch, what may be most perplexing of all is that it *might* have some significance if one could decode it, making it almost Hitchcockian in its surreal red herring-like nature. Watching a Lynch film is often a matter of looking for the keys to the whole corpus; great puzzling "true meaning;" Scenes such as these seem to serve as subtle winks from the director after that fashion.

The actual dinner event is also quite bizarre. The most notable occurrence within the scene is the offer Bill X make's to Henry to slice the "man-made chicken." This would normally be an inclusive gesture for a father-in-law

to make to his soon-to-be son-in-law, but being a scene in

a Lynch film, this stock event in human life becomes

twisted and laden with a different kind of significance.

Bill X admits to Henry that his daughter is usually the one

to cut the chickens due to his lame arms inability to

properly slice the meat. This disability obviously marks

the father as a disempowered individual, forced to rely on

the help of others to perform duties normally allotted to

the man in a stereotypical family situation. The fact that

the daughter usually slices the chicken might have other

significance as well as a function of the bird's later

grotesque revelation. When Henry goes to cut the bird, he

finds that, thought it appears fully cooked and prepared,

it paradoxically retains some of its animation.

Furthermore, when he cuts into it, it begins to bleed

profusely in a manner which horrifies Henry and the viewer.

The cutting also seems to garner a reaction from the mother

that seems equally orgasmic and horrific. This is a

visceral event to be sure, but it may also suggest a

transaction that is undertaken between Henry and the family

for Mary's hymnal dowry. If we consider it first as the an

offering of the father giving over this "responsibility" of

Mary's hymen to Henry and we second note that it

immediately precedes the mention of the birth of the baby, we can understand the surreal significance of this strange exchange.

Following this bloody scene is a discomforting presentation of a different sort: that of Mother X threatening Harry into a shotgun marriage by telling him of Mary's clandestine pregnancy. We are immediately clued into something preternatural at work because of the relative time differential between the possibilities of conception, which the Mother intimates was quite recently, and the child's subsequent birth in a hospital that is never shown. We are made to feel very squeamish by the intensity of the mother's accusation and by her pseudo-sexual assault she produces when she begins to nibble on the standing-prone Henry. As this scene is the final impression we have of where Mary X comes from, the way in which she reacts later is put in a better frame of reference. Coming from such a bizarre and dysfunctional family would place any young person into a bad place psychologically. All in all, the whole episode is certainly no healthy way in which to launch a lasting and stable marriage. From bizarre humor to final uncomfortable social relations, this section of the film plays both as comic relief for the other draining

aspects of the picture and as a series of red herrings that never get answered (i.e. the kitchen environment, the lighting fast pregnancy, the motivation behind the mother's molestation, etc).

Hovel is Where the Home is

Without any interloping scenes, we are then immediately confronted with Mary taking care of the "baby." As mentioned, Lynch has never disclosed how the baby was made, but it is certainly seems more fetal than human, which may be due to its extreme premature birth and underdevelopment. What it lacks in definition, though, it retains in shear lung power, bleating as it does throughout the scenes that follow nearly continuously. In some ways, the baby is the "human" counterpoint to the constant industrial sounds, a cacophony of grinding and inhuman notes that seems to crush the souls of all present. Alien to the players in the film and alien to the audience, the creature is one of the strangest figures in the whole film. For her part, Mary seems to only care for the child as a matter of duty and the disgust she shows for the monstrous child is apparent. Another division between Mary and her freak-spawn is its utter rejection of her specifically. By refusing to feed or to appreciate any of the maternal

gestures Mary constantly attempts to procure, it rejects

the natural report it should have with her as her

offspring.

Henry enters the building downstairs from an unknown

engagement to find another worm in his mailbox. He takes

the creature with him to the room and proceeds to hide it

from Mary by stuffing it into his dresser. Whether this is

symbolic of a forbidden strange correspondence or not is

never addressed, however that he hides it from his new wife

and that he places the foul creature into a "treasure"

jewelry box may be telling. Regardless of the true nature

of this purloined creature, Mary unfortunately seems to

know it is there and resents that her husband has hidden

something "precious" away from her. Whether it is because

of this secrecy or because of the demonic creature that is

their baby, Mary soon announces her intention to leave the

home to return to her family's abode. Mary cites the

incessant gargles of the child as an invasion of her

ability to sleep and thus her inability to remain with

Henry. While she promises she will return, she never does,

stranding a husband and a child that she has proven unable

to nurture. Henry, ever the stoic nitwit, seems saddened

but not destroyed by the loss of his bride. We never truly

know if he loved Mary, just that he kept a photo of her in his bureau unceremoniously torn in two.

Daddy and Spawn Alone at Last

He is then summoned by the cries of the child-thing, who appears to have fallen ill. Strangely, the creature seems to respond more strongly to Henry than to his now-absent maternal figure. There is a strange form of juxtaposition between the two parent's relationships with the creature. Whereas the mother cannot console the child's constant reports, its father seems to be able, without any true training, to both sooth it into quietude and to keep it that way. Following this relational pattern, the mother leaves without the child putting much care into the matter at all, but when Henry attempts to leave, it becomes nearly violently inconsolable. This structure is a difficult one to ascertain on the surface, for it works against natural inclinations. As the child has no apparent sex, nor is any reference made to its sex, it is difficult to know whether there is even any Freudian link to understanding its acceptance-rejection paradox.

Following this, Henry descends once again into a dream state, dreaming of a woman he now sees in his radiator. The woman has a chipmunk-like face, appears very kewpie-doll-

like and is standing upon a stage where calipee music can be heard. She seems to not be a human but instead an avatar of some force; that force is most likely Death fir a number of reasons that come to be demonstrated later on.

Her expressions and actions seem both childlike and otherworldly, not unlike a pixie of some sort. She begins to dance on the stage, stamping out worms that fall on the stage. Whether one takes these creatures as representations of sperm, sin or simply as slimy creatures, this violent stamping presents a strong physical counterpoint to her amicable gesturing. As a phantasmal event, it is difficult to concretely discern any of what happens in this sequence. One might see her as a feminine, caring counterpoint to Mary, a view that is strongly counterbalanced by the scene that follows. Henry returns from this vision to finding himself in bed with Mary, who he discovers is filled with large worms. If we take the worms to be sperm, this may signify a certain gender-centric viewpoint of his former paramour, while if we take them to represent sin, we see the inherent rottenness Henry sees in her. In an act of violent disgust and negation, Henry begins to cast the worms onto the wall near his dresser, acts that awake his

"pet" worm in the jewelry box. The creature immediately consumes Henry.

Seduction onto Death

In the next scene, we find Henry picking at his clothes, when he hears a low knock. He opens the door to find his sexy neighbor who informs him that she has locked herself out of her home. She asks to spend the night with him, with the obvious intention of seducing the newly separated man. The seduction is notable for a number of reasons. First, it is shot in near complete shadowy darkness, allowing only for a terrascuro framing of the principles' faces, the door, and the later images of a bed and a bath. It takes the normally sparse set of Henry's room and reduces it into a series of single darkly-framed images that express one action at a time. In effect, the whole scene forms a complex tableau of human seduction. A second notable element of the scene is Henry's purposeful stifling of the mutant-child with his hand, which may signify any number of things. First, at a Darwinian level, it may be an attempt by Henry to deny and obscure the fact that his faulty genes were responsible for this monstrosity in light of the impending offer to mate. Secondly, by suppressing the baby's cries, he is also denying the fruit

of his marriage in the face of this erotic, extra-material interloper. Finally, the snuffing gesture portents the murder of the baby that will soon take place.

The final element that makes the scene noteworthy is the immersion of the two lovers in a bath of milky-substance. Making love in a basin is certainly nothing out of the ordinary, but the immersion into milky liquid of this clandestine and adulterous affair in front the child-thing certainly cements the intentions of Henry to totally disregard his wife and offspring. That the water is milk-like suggests that it might be of a seminal nature or perhaps even of a mixture of both sex-specific fluids. If so, the lovers descent into the cloudy abyss symbolizes a deadly interlacing of both liquids: the fluids that provide and sustain life are now being used to consume and deny it. In an interesting piece of placement, the Woman appears to devour Henry, smothering him like he smothered the child's cries as she drags him down in a full kiss of lust-death. As their hair combines above the milky-liquid in a tableau of negation, so too do they sink into their watery abyss.

A Man finds Himself Guilty in His Own Head

Henry's descent into sin is shown to be quite literal,
as we witness his iconic hair descend into the milky water,
only to watch that water part to reveal the realm of the
Lady in the Radiator. This figure speaks for the first
time, singing a strange song which I have included here for
the sake of clarity.

> In heaven, everything is fine./ You've got your good
>
> things, and I've got mine./ In heaven, everything is
>
> fine. /You've got your good things, and you've got
>
> mine.

Since we never hear the figure speak again, it can be
assumed that the song is her own, not merely the words of
another. Therefore, because of her promises that everything
"in Heaven is Fine," we can assume that she is a projection
of the afterlife, whether she is an avatar of Death or even
a cherub. Because the scene preceding it shows the planet
transposed over the action once again, it is possible that
her realm is also the Man in the Planet's abode. This
supposition marks both of them as otherworldly figures
(even though the whole movie lacks significant "realism")
and thus from a similar plane of existence.

Before going any further, it should be noted that although this scene composes a very small part of the film, it has become iconic enough to be one of the first things many people think of when someone mention's *Eraserhead*. The Lady in the Radiator is a prototypical Lynchian construct (the first of many to come in his career), as a strange pixie-mutant woman that embodies an ideal of hope as simulacrum. Her glowing gravitas is like none other in the film, yet she is also the most unnatural of all the humanoids that Henry interacts with (excepting the baby, which is just as much animal as human). That spiritual vs. physical juxtaposition, where a mutant communicates or stands-in for one of the humane emotions their more "normal" counterparts seem to lack, is a theme Lynch would revisit again in the *Elephant Man* (1980), his mainstream follow-up to this film. In that later film, as in this one, the "freak" John Merrick was, in fact, the film's most deeply compassionate persona. Here, too, we see the most humane loving influence in the whole film made doubly ironic because "she" is in fact something like a Death figure. Certainly the character is as blatantly unreal as a cartoon or a smiling doll, but she is the only one that shows Henry any genuine affection at all.

Along with the various animals, the baby and the other "god" Man in the Planet, the Lady in the Radiator is also one of pivotal figures to the argument that all the characters may not truly be as they seem. In his later works, such as the television show *Twin Peaks* (1991), Lynch shows a proclivity for creating anthropomorphic and spatio-morphic representations of greater ideals. For example, the character of "BOB" from that series is a personification of evil, while the White and Black Lodges serve as the supernatural abodes of the spirit (not unlike the Radiator and the Planet). Much as "BOB" did, the Lady in the Radiator seems to have powers as well, for when Henry touches her, his world is engulfed in white light or, more to the point, the absence of everything: oblivion.

The scene then progresses into a succession of images. We see the Man in the Planet, then the worms traveling across the floor, and then the rolling out of a large replica of the dead tree that Henry has on his nightstand. If this is a dream-state, then these may represent REM-type image-thoughts. Alternately, as Henry proceeds to walk behind a very stand-like divider, complete with hand rail, one might conclude that these figures are witnesses and evidence of some sort. The nervous Henry's head then leaps

off of his shoulders with the sound of a uncoiled spring. While obviously played for comic effect, the scene also connotes a sense of judgment. Whether it is the dreaming Henry who judges himself or some other force (the tree that proceeds to bleed, the god-like figure, the worms, etc.), the verdict is quite literally "off with his head." While said head lies in a pool of the blood that has spilled from the tree, Henry's head is replaced by the monster-child which starts to let lose a primal cry-howl. The judgment for his guilt has been reached and his head is sucked down into the blood.

Only in Another World Will Any of This Have Real Meaning?

The head then falls to the street in what appears to be another level of existence. While this place bears some similarity to the wasteland of Henry's existence, it lacks much of his world's spiritual flavor. It features none of the characters that appear in the other parts of the film and is most relevant for the symbolism it ascribes to Henry's "existence." It is possible that this is the "realer" world of Henry Spencer's actual existence as seen through a clearer dream state (as Henry obviously isn't there). A homeless man is first seen, obviously suffering

from a state of decay. Then, a scamp child runs up and snatches up Henry's now broken head and brings it to a pencil-making shop. Obviously, Henry is still living and dreaming in this abstract world, for the child brings his disemboweled head to a machine-shop for processing into erasers. What can be said for the differences between this "realer" world and Henry's own is that people can be seen practicing their professions instead of merely speaking of them, that commerce is transpiring, that human suffering is present outside of the range of Henry's direct experience, and that true human children are shown. This is a diverse world of action, unlike Henry's Hades-like realm.

The attendant at the pencil-making shop that first sees the child, summons his manager, an irate individual who yells at his inferior for the disturbance. There is, again, an element of humor here, as the boss is very much a Jackie Gleason-type of character. The boss and the child proceed to take the head to a machinist who grinds it into erasers, giving credence to the name of the movie. This transformation gives perhaps the greatest clue to a dualistic meaning to the Henry character as a creature that holds the qualities of an "Eraserhead." There is an obvious nightmarish quality to the dream, but when contrasted to

the other nightmarish environments, creatures, and acts in the film, it is perhaps significantly less spectral and more parallel to the other action in the film.

The Descent and Damnation of Henry Spencer

Henry awakes from this experience and seems too troubled to sleep. He thinks he hears some activity going on down below, which he sees out his window are men violently digging, and then in his neighbor's apartment. He goes to check on her, only to find she is not home. Upon return to the apartment, the child-thing seems to mock him with its death rattle-like hoots; one might conjecture that this is another mere figment of Henry's unbridled imagination and angst over his unrequited attraction to his next-door neighbor. Henry, lost in the troubled thoughts on his bed, then hears the neighbor arrive home with a strange man. They both regard him with scorn and Henry envisions her seeing him as the baby-in-his-body creature from the judgment scene in the other realm. It becomes obvious that the woman is a prostitute, thus annihilating Henry's hopes of a clandestine, but passionate, relationship with her. Henry, crushed, sinks to his floor, a lonely man boggled by a life gone wrong and saddled with a monstrous, accursed offspring.

Henry, drowsed with remorse and filled with angst-ridden hopelessness, realizes the monster-child is the cause of all his suffering. He grabs a scissors from his cabinet and begins to sever the child's wrappings. It becomes apparent these are a part of its body or life-support, making his action one of infanticide. At first he hesitates with obvious second thoughts, but the child begins to go into shock as its eviscerated insides become exposed. A truly horrific scene follows as Henry then severs the child's internal organs (possibly its heart ventricles), before himself being repulsed and casting the scissors away. The thing begins to hemorrhage and spit blood, Henry reels back into a corner, looking away as the child-thing's life-force climbs out of its body as a foam-like substance that begin to n rapidly ooze out of its carcass.

As the baby-thing lies dieing, the lights begin to flicker ominously. A huge bust of the child's head begins to swing around in the darkness, as Henry cowers. The lights fail completely and we are once again confronted by the planet. A section of the sphere bursts open, revealing the Man trying desperately to jam his machinery. Henry stands framed in light and dust, a look of horrified

realization on his face. The screen goes all white (as it did when Henry touched the Lady in the Radiator before) and out comes the Lady, who embraces Henry. We see her shining with earnest love over his shoulder, as he closes his eyes in resignation.

Structural Analysis of the Film's Radically Creative Subtextual Level

To assess the film's radically creative structure, I have chosen to use the critical framework of Vladimir Propp (1928/1962). However, I am applying it to a situation that is not a folktale, which was Propp's focus. Propp breaks down the various plot elements and characters into the smallest units of narrative structure that he calls "narratemes." Narratemes are typologies that can be combined and plotted along a chart that maps out a complete narrative. In Propp's research, these formulations lead to the establishment of an analytical "stock" of seven basic characters or dyads (villain, hero, princess, helper, donor, father and princess, dispatcher and hero) and a number of common situations that formed a general morphology of the Russian folktale. These morphologies can then be applied to conclusions about folktales; Propp was

able to argue that a continuum of 37 different folktale

structures can be found in the lexicon of Russian folklore,

with each tale inevitably falling neatly within one of

those structures. The content of the folktale was not

important to Propp, but its structural categorization is,

to the point where he is able to offer a coded map of each

tale for comparison to other tales. In my analysis, I have

chosen to disregard the parts of Propp's arguments that

seek to establish a common structure to similar works of

fiction simply because a mad rhetoric is a singular work of

radical creativity that is not comparable to other works. I

am not arguing that the structure of Lynch's film is

similar to another surreal film's construction, I am

arguing that it makes a unique contribution to entire genre

of filmmaking. No one filmmaker had encoded a structural

code such as this into the narrative of their feature-

length film at the time of *Eraserhead's* release. Still, I

have used the spirit of Propp's system to break down the

structure of *Eraserhead* using narratemes of my own design

as a way to expose the dynamics of that structure in

comparison to the diegesis I have also provided. I believe

this method offers me the best established critical

standpoint with which to systematically list that structure

while rejecting the comparative function of Propp's critical method as inapplicable.

Morphology of *Eraserhead*

    I. Initial Situation---

        A. Introduction of the Eraserhead (Henry).

        B. The fall of the Eraserhead.

        C. The introduction of the Tormentor (the Man in the Planet).

            1. The introduction of the lair of the Tormentor (the Planet).

            2. The corruption of the Seed (formal meaning of the Worms found here) into the Infection.

    II. Introduction of the Wasteland.

        A. Demonstration of the Eraserhead's existence in the Wasteland.

        B. Introduction of the inner sanctum of the Eraserhead.

            1. Demonstration of Eraserhead's Estrangement via his remote home location.

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a. The lack of communication to the Eraserhead (Henry checks his mail).

b. The portent of an Evil Presence (the flickering of the elevator's Electric Lights).

c. The apprehension of notice by the Libido (The Neighbor).

d. The ritual arrangement of the inner sanctum.

III. The Eraserhead is summoned by the Reason (Mary X).

A. The heralding of the Libido for the Reason.

   1. The Eraserhead's appraisal of the Libido.

B. The sojourn of the Eraserhead through the Wasteland.

   1. The demonstration of Wasteland's decay.

   2. The broadcast of static-disorder.

C. The arrival of the Eraserhead at the home of The Reason.

   1. The conflict of the Eraserhead with the Reason.

   a. The Reason's admonishment of the Eraserhead.

b. The Eraserhead's Rebuttal of

   Abandonment.

D. The introduction of the Minor Brain Functions

   (Mary X's family).

   1. The demonstration of the Eraserhead and

      the Reason's bond.

   2. The interrogation of the Eraserhead by

      the Progressor (Mother X).

   3. The proclamation of the Order-Keeper

      (Bill X).

   4. The demonstration of death of Hope

      (Grandmother X).

E. The congregation of the intellectual mind.

   1. The announcement of the lameness of the

      Order-Keeper.

   2. The Offering-Sacrifice (the chicken)

      made.

      a. The desecration of the

         Offering-Sacrifice (the cutting of the

         chicken).

   3. The arrival of Ill-Omen (sudden

      darkness).

   4. The accusation of the Progressor.

        a. The demand of the Progressor.

        b. The molestation of the Eraserhead.

     5. The joining of the Eraserhead and the

       Reason.

IV. The corruption of the Eraserhead's Sanctum by the

Tumor.

    A. The attempt to compensate for the Tumor.

       1. Reason attempts and fails to bring

        stability to the abode in the absence of

        the Eraserhead.

        a. The tumor erodes the sanity of the

         Reason.

    B. The Eraserhead arrives In the Abode.

       1. The Eraserhead is further infected and

        its communication is made sterile.

       2. The Eraserhead attempts to conceal this

        infection.

    C. The Eraserhead contemplates the beyond.

    D. Reason and the Eraserhead attempt to coexist.

       1. Reason degrades into alarmed fear.

       2. Reason flees.

    E. The Eraserhead degrades into libidinal

    response.

F. The Tumor debilitates the Eraserhead.

    1. The Tumor does not allow the Eraserhead the ability to perform its duties.

    2. The Tumor causes the Eraserhead to become temporarily inert.

V. The Eraserhead Sojourns to the Other World.

    A. Death promises the Eraserhead Peace.

        1. Death negates the Infection.

    B. The Eraserhead discovers that Reason has been consumed by the Infection.

    C. Part of the Eraserhead is consumed by Infection.

        1. The Eraserhead succumbs to libidinal instincts.

        2. The Eraserhead attempts to conceal the Tumor.

    D. The Eraserhead realizes that Death negates Sexual desire.

    E. The Tormentor summons his spent Infection.

    F. The Eraserhead is replaced by the Tumor.

        1. Life begins to seep away.

    G. The Eraserhead falls.

VI. The mind corrodes.

A. The Libido rejects the Eraserhead completely.

    1. The Eraserhead becomes sealed into its Sanctum.

        a. The Tumor mocks the Eraserhead.

B. The Eraserhead Eviscerates the Tumor.

    1. The Tumor erupts.

C. The Sanctum crumbles.

D. The Eraserhead comprehends Oblivion (actual annihilation).

    1. The Tormentor fails to prolong the Mind's torment.

E. Death brings the beauty of Oblivion.

The Visible Façade of the Story

In order to demonstrate how the façade of the narrative transmogrifies into its deeper structural meaning, I now include a breakdown of each character or place as they are shown in the story, followed by what they structurally represent. Some elements of the story only carry meaning on one level, making them solely functions of that level, while others present a dualistic meaning. There are aspects of the various narrative-level characters and places in the story that hint to their structural meanings, but they are both numerous and nuanced in such a way as to

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never distract from the progression of the surreal plot. Because it a surreal narrative, however, the *possibility* for multiple meanings enters into the equation, giving each character or feature of the story the opportunity to have a second figurative connotation. By demonstrating the narrative meaning of each character or feature, I therefore can present why their "live" characteristics are important to their structural meaning. In listing these general descriptions of each character and place, followed by a listing of their structural meanings, it is also my intention to offer the reader a reference point from which to follow this part of my critical analysis. Because the plot centers on Henry Spenser as both a character in the narrative and as the *Eraserhead* in the structure, most of these descriptions correspond to his actions in some way.

Characters and Elements in the Narrative

Henry Spencer (Jack Nance): Henry Spencer, an Anglo man presumably in his 30's, is a printer by trade, although this is self-reported as he is on vacation. A bachelor living in a decrepit apartment building in an industrial wasteland, Henry is a restless and pathetic soul, walking through life with a constant worried look on his face and a protracted nervous persona.

The Man in the Planet (Jack Fisk): The Man in the
Planet appears twice in the movie as a figure within a
workshop with a series of large levels and a dingy window.
He appears to live within an asteroid or planet of some
sort, and has no spoken lines. It can be assumed he is an
anthropomorphic representation of some ideal, possibly a
godlike figure who sets things in motion with the pull of
his levers. Further augmenting his "god-like"
characteristics is his unnatural appearance which is laden
with strange growths and crags. Finally, because he only
shows himself at key points of the narrative in reaction to
the actions Henry takes, his presence is always accompanied
by notions of fatalism.

The Rock-Asteroid: A rock that appears super-imposed
over Henry's face in his dream and the location-home of the
Man in the Planet. If the Man in the Planet is the
representation of a deity, it can be assumed this place has
some holy connotations to it, possibly signifying an
afterworld or a place of faith.

The "Worms": Worms appear throughout the picture in
accordance to Henry's actions and dreams. They may
symbolize sinful thoughts or even a seminal influence on

Henry, although they have no direct influence on the story except as metaphors and as strange tormentors.

The "Baby": A monstrous, bleating child-thing that retains embryonic and reptilian features. It is supposed to be the result of a sexual union between Mary X and Henry. The Baby may or may not be an actual creature, as it could represent the evils Henry has produced. Alternately, it may be a normal human baby that we perceive through Henry's eyes as a monstrosity. It represents the outcome or consequence of a sin or evil deed. It also suggests Henry's failure as a man unable to produce a normal child, instead creating something even more pathetic and twisted than he is.

Mary X (Charlotte Stewart): Mary X is Henry's estranged girlfriend who lives with her family until Henry comes by. An easily startled young woman, she is both pretty and manic. She is in many ways Henry's foil and is ill-suited for him in any regard.

Mary's Family: Generally an odd bunch. Mr. X (Allen Joseph) is a jovial, possibly mentally ill, plumber. Mrs. X (Jeanne Bates) is a domineering personality that forces Henry into taking Mary in. Grandma X (Jean Lange) is a catatonic smoker.

The Radiator: Inside this utility lies a strange stage-like place and it is the dwelling of the Lady in the Radiator.

The Girl Across the Hall (Judith Anna Roberts): This is a Henry's beautiful neighbor and a source of temptation for him sexually. It is she who first alerts him to the call from the X's. She ultimately rejects him for another man.

The Lady in the Radiator (Laurel Near): A bizarre, chipmunk-faced woman who bears a strong resemblance to a kewpie doll. She sings the song *In Heaven*. Henry ends up in her embrace at the end of the film. It is strongly suggested that she represents Death.

Electric Lights: These effects accent all of David Lynch movie as a way of denote the presence of the forces of good and evil. Electricity represents light-good and darkness represents evil.

The Hidden Structural Meaning of the Characters and Elements

The Mind: The true landscape of the movie. Whose mind it is unknown, although it is conceivable that it is the mind of some external "Henry," due to the events that focus on him as its protagonist and the presence of constant

male-centric symbols like the sperm-worms. Everything that
occurs and occupies this space is a metaphorical component
of an internalized representation of this mind. It is a
place falling into degradation because of the tumor that is
the baby.

Henry Spencer: Henry Spencer is the Eraserhead, which
is to say he is the reflexive device in the Mind that
attempts to compensate for the other destabilizing elements
that wrack the mind's existence. Through the examination of
mannerisms of this specter of complacency, we can glean
that the mind feels doomed to its course of action,
trudging through its thought-existence simply as a matter
of habit.

The Man in the Planet: While in the narrative
examination of the film, the Workman is a god, in the
structural analysis of the screenplay, he is something like
a Tormentor who seeds Henry's mind with the Baby-tumor. His
machines are thus engines of entropy.

The "Worms": At the structural level the worms are the
Infection that produce the Baby-tumor. They are present at
all times when the tumor is an active element of the plot
and are they are seeds of destruction themselves. Slowly
each part of the Mind becomes either replaced by these

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infections or ceases to be perceived (i.e. becomes destroyed utterly).

The "Baby": The baby, quite simply, is the Tumor that has infected the Mind. Its bleating and thrashing inside of the Mind is what is causing the Mind all the existential distress that the action in the play represents. It is the great symbol of the mind's progressive annihilation and is, in a sense, its twisted heartbeat. At the climax of the film, the Tumor is destroyed, sealing the fate of the mind which is now totally and irrevocably Infected.

Mary X: Mary X represents the mind's Rational Instinct or its capacity to Reason (a simplified title I use in the morphology). This Rational Instinct operates as a train of productive thought that functions at a higher level than that of the Eraserhead. It is both sensitive and highly volatile because its regular duty is to absorb important information that transpires and to bear intellectual resolution. It cannot take the interference that the baby represents, which is why it flees when it is. It is noteworthy that this is a female persona and is thus, at the narrative level, the mother of the baby. At the structural level, however, Mary X is not the bearer of this monstrosity (the action of which is never shown), but is

rather a partner in its care, which is to say a partner in attempting to contain it. Mary X shows no love for the child simply because it is something she is tasked with dealing with as the rational echelon of thought. It is questionable whether Mary X, as the rational section of the brain, actually recognizes the baby as a tumor at an intellectual level or if she is lost in the malaise of her surrounds just as much as Henry is, disjoined from utilizing the full capacity of her abilities in the collapsing Mind-World she lives in. The fact that Henry and Mary are "married" is also important. Just as no live birthing takes place within the narrative, so too does no actual marriage ceremony take place. In fact, it is feasible that they have always been "married" as the two major parts of the Mind's psyche. If this supposition is accepted at this hidden structural level of meaning, the hubbub at the house regarding the shotgun marriage of these two upper halves of the Mind is symbolic of a call to arms by the other parts of the Mind that the family represents. The "marriage" union is thus symbolic of an armistice that will bring the two halves to full vigilant attention against the Baby-Tumor menace.

Mary X's Family: Mary X's family represent, in a sense, minor orders of brain's function. Bill X, who claims he is a plumber, is probably something analogous to the maintainer of thought-order. As he rambles about the way things were and his role in creating the pipes in the place, he demonstrates his loss of control over the reasonable order of the Mind-World. He is the Order-Keeper. Her mother represents both ambition and intellectual alarum, as demonstrated by her interrogation of Henry regarding his job and her instance that something be proactively done about the infection that she knows will soon be brought against the Mind. She is the Progressor. The grandmother represents Hope, which is to say that hope in this Mind has been doomed to a catatonic state, humored with the trappings of active life by the Progressor who fears for her own negation.

The Woman Across the Hall: Henry's neighbor represents the Libido. In the absence of Reason (Mary), the more animalistic and instinctual Eraserhead is tempted to find some solace in the Woman's arms, only to discover that is a futile and momentary endeavor as his attention and ability to sustain arousal wavers. In reminding him in the beginning of his commitment to Mary, the neighbor

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demonstrates its initial commitment to the order that rules

at that point, but when that order begins to crumble, the

Libido reverts back to its feral nature.

The Radiator and the Lady: This is the realm of the

Beyond, to the extent that the Mind can conceive it. The

Lady represents more than Death, but some Othered

connection to the world of beyond which the Eraserhead

experiences prior to its disablement.

The Industrial Environment: This is the interior of

the Mind. It is ruined as a representation of the sickness

that infects it. The buildings are representations of

stations of the mind and their decay is an indication of

their total ruin.

The Significance of *Eraserhead* as a Mad Rhetoric

At its base narrative level, *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) is

a masterful work of cinematic complexity. As a harbinger of

things to come from Lynch as a director, it sets a surreal

precedent that signifies his genius for never losing his

audience's attention even as he baffles them with often

conflicting imagery, sounds, and performances. We have in

this film's narrative the story of a man living out his

life in a existential nightmare, forced into a series of

horrific events that complete ravage his manhood, his sanity, and his ability to function at all. At this level, *Eraserhead* is a complete movie experience, for it tells a unique story in an avant-garde fashion that is both memorable and evocative. Although ticket sales are never a rock-solid indication of a film's creative success, its selection for inclusion into the National Film Registry certainly signifies the import many viewers have come to recognize in it. As with all mad rhetorics, the film never has to escape this "base" level of meaning. That the film is coherent enough to be available to other radically different interpretations is a testament to its genius. The best exemplar of how this narrative transubstantiates into its radically creative second level of meaning would be to compare that dichotomy to a special kind of wall map. On such a map, you have an assortment of geographical features and man-made points of civilization in between the areas that the map covers. At this practical level, the map functions as an accurate representation of an area that viewers can reference for their various needs. If, however, each of these points make up a larger figure whose individual parts are named and placed in such a fashion as to suggest a dual role at the altered state of meaning, the

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map becomes more than just a representation of an area but a representation something more that area can represent. Furthermore, not unlike the stars that make up a constellation, what if these individual hubs create a larger picture that bears no significance at all to the topographical map? This is the kind of leap of cognition necessary to comprehend *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) at its structural level. Of course, what makes this radical shift in meaning all the more amazing is that it was constructed using the three-dimensional world only films (not two-dimensional maps) can supply.

At the time of *Eraserhead's* release in 1977, no film had ever demonstrated this kind of parallax meaning and I do not believe any film has again. To suggest that all of the action in a film is merely representative of some larger, unseen field of action is a revolutionary concept I would say few filmmakers could even comprehend, much less make. It is difficult to access if Lynch himself ever lent much weight to this dualistic meaning, for he rarely discusses any of his project's "true meanings." If that is the case, it could still be mad rhetorical in that this secondary level of meaning was simply one of many messages he was trying to communicate through the surreal scenes he

has included in the film. Interestingly, a number of additional scenes were shot for this film but were cut, so I don't know if their inclusion would have had the effect of destroying the delicate nature of its structural meaning. Regardless, because Lynch left these "extras" out of all releases of the work proves that he believed that they were extraneous.

Once the movie ventured into the public sphere, the film came into the dominion of critical interpretation, where others can contribute to its new "life" of meaning. As a critic, I have claimed my own personal meaning from my analysis of this film. I would venture to say that most would not glean this secondary structural meaning. I use as proof of this assessment that I have never read in any of the literature a similar structural criticism of the film, although many criticisms are available that are similar to my narrative analysis of *Eraserhead* (1977/2006). That I as a critic am able to recognize the significance of the secondary narrative meaning is proof that Lynch successfully communicated a unique work of mad rhetoric.

Eraserhead's Mark on Post-Modern and Surrealist Filmmaking Traditions

It is worthwhile to note that even at its narrative level, *Eraserhead* is a film with few equals. It is, in many ways, the first creative salvo in Lynch of the filmmaking equivalent of the artist Salvatore Dali. There were certainly experimental films that hint at similar themes and textures, such as the films of German Expressionism and the films of Andy Warhol, but those films always worked either as direct metaphors or as productions that were meant to define new ways in which filmmakers could appeal to an audience's taste. Furthermore, *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) at the narrative level has many equals in the genre of existentialist fiction, such as *1984* (1949), *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), and *The Plague* (1947), but none of those works carry a structural map that completely transforms their meaning. Lynch's work has also inspired many films in the years since *Eraserhead's* release in 1977. Films such as *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), *Barton Fink* (1991), and *Donnie Darko* (2001) as well as the work of directors Terry Gilliam and Darren Aronofsky owe just as much credit for their common inspiration as Lynch did to directors Stanley Kubrick (who

was himself in turn found of Lynch's work) and Orson Welles.

It is difficult to know if any particular creator has drawn directly upon the mad rhetorical structure of *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) as an inspiration or has included such a construct into their work. The films *Pi* (1998) and *The Fountain* (2007) by Darren Aronofsky both bear distinctly similar feelings of surrealism to *Eraserhead* (1977/2006), including the possible presence of a mad rhetorical relationship between their structure and their narrative. As mentioned before, no critic has ever revealed Lynch's structural level of meaning either to the best of my knowledge. What is perhaps much more likely is that a subliminal level of comprehension has taken place, influencing the formation of other mad rhetorics from the radical creativity of their creators. The effect that *Eraserhead* (1977/2006) has had in launching Lynch's visionary career and inspiring the imaginations of many creators who have enjoyed its narrative level of meaning is a much more feasible assessment of the situation, a fitting legacy for an unique film.

Ultimately, when it comes to medium of film, any specific mad rhetorical critical style will have to be

adapted to the particular element of that mad rhetoric that the critic wishes to expose as a radical creativity. Because film works on so many rhetorical levels, I anticipate that it will require a critical approach that bears some similarity to the one I have included here, with the substitution of a critical approach other than a structural analysis (unless this is again applicable) for another more appropriate one. I see the mad rhetorical film as leading to the mad rhetoric in the labyrinthine fashion I have deduced other rhetorical forms do; however, with film, one must isolate particular part of that work, thus (perhaps ironically) limiting the film's rhetorical corpus from a multi-dimensional form to a singular, radically creative constant.

CHAPTER SIX

MAD RHETORICAL THEORY AND ITS PLACE IN THE FIELD

OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Mad rhetorics are few in number, but historically they represent some of the most important acts of rhetorical communication. They represent the watershed moments in the greater fabric of human design, where a single creator is successfully able to stretch a recognized, creative form in a new direction, using an unique idea wholly his or her own. Mad rhetorics represent monumental acts of creative accomplishment, for they require a merging of recognizable forms drawn from the mad rhetor's long history in working with a particular genre with the mad rhetor's own unique concept. Radical creativity goes one step beyond the bounds of the normal creative process in that it requires a personal translation of the unique *chora* germ of inspiration into the creative process of assembling thoughts and ideas into recognizable forms. This process culminates with the construction of a creative work meant to fit into a creative genre or tradition that is recognizable by others. Because others must merge that *chora* into their mental realms where they store all other

creativity activity and they work to assemble rhetorics
from previous creative forms, they must first recognize
that works of mad rhetoric are quintessentially works that
they, and especially communication studies scholars, can
study as radically creative works. They can read to
recognize how mad rhetors can wrap original ideas in
rhetorical forms that others can appreciate.

One of the other purposes of this research was to
discredit the false link within the literature between
mental illness and the production of what I have termed mad
rhetorics. It is my contention that the sheer complexity of
radically creative design stands completely outside of the
realm of the creative capacities of those suffering bouts
of mental infirmity. This is a conclusion that runs
contrary to many previous assumptions, conjectures, and
research in the literature. I believe the reason the
connection has been made between the "divine madness" that
Plato (Ion) considered to be state of pure genius and what
I term "mad rhetorical" state is because, when mad rhetors
are able to formulate from within themselves unique
radically creative concepts that are not part of the
respective creative traditions they regularly employ,
others do not understand the source and evidence of their

radical creativity. The works of mad rhetoric that result

when these radically creative concepts are incorporated

into forms others can appreciate may, to a certain

untrained eye, seem like the production of a foreign or

"mad" mind. The mad rhetorical state, for those who are

witnessing it, might very well resemble the manic condition

of the Oracles of Greece as they became "possessed" with

prophetic inspiration "drawn from the æther." While later-

day researchers have conjectured from various findings

about the living conditions that caused these prophetesses

to fall under the influence of some form of intoxicant, the

mad rhetor under the sway of the mad rhetorical state that

may superficially resemble these prophetic frenzies. The

mad rhetor is engaged in no less intense a process,

although their inspiration is drawn uniquely from the

"spheres within" where the unique *chora* is transformed into

the radical creativity. Mad rhetors are not creators stuck

up in the throes of schizophrenic torment: they are the

rhetors Henri Bergson (1946) references when talking about

stream-of-consciousness writing, Žižek (2006) sees gazing

through the parallax view, the deterritorializing creators

of rhizomatic meanings of which Giles Deleuze and Felix

Guattari (1983) speak, the telegraphers of Nicholas Royle's

(1991) research, and those engaged in the Zen-like creative "flows" described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997). In short, they are creators of the highest form and spirit, working completely outside the psychological agony that breaks down the mentally ill's will and the ability to communicate. Simply put, they are mad rhetors.

It is also my contention that critics cannot assess whether a rhetor is mentally ill during the process of creating a work through an examination of their work, but they can analyze the radically creative state of the mad rhetor as it manifests itself in their work. I contend that many of the mad rhetorics that exist come from those who have suffered from mental illness or other catastrophic life changes, for pain is one of the greatest motivations behind the creative impulse. In creating something of lasting importance, we are able to achieve a limited form of immortality as we redeem our suffering into an act of creation. Thus, the critic does a disservice to the mad rhetor in attempting to classify them as a sufferer from mental illness, and they do them a great service by classifying them as a mad rhetor through the analysis and classification of their mad rhetoric. By basing a mad rhetorical critique strictly on a singular work of mad

rhetoric, the critic is able to circumvent the inconclusive pitfalls of attempting to gather whether a particular creator was suffering from a mental illness through the available text and accompanying biographical information. The critic can be precise in their assessment of a mad rhetoric and they can identify that work by directly pointing to the radically creative element of that work as conclusive proof of its mad rhetorical essence. Furthermore, critics can zero in on autobiographical and biographical information that is directly pertinent to that particular author's radically creative process and their history in the creative field they have mastered without losing themselves in extraneous speculation. By defining a particular work as a mad rhetoric, the critic is thus able to canonize it both as a milestone in its respective creative tradition and as an example of a particular kind of mad rhetoric for other critics to reference in the production of their own research and metacritical analyses of the role mad rhetorics play in the rhetorical communication of creative material.

Criticizing the Mad Rhetoric

I chose these three mad rhetorics for very specific reasons, but primarily because they allow me to demonstrate the ways in which mad rhetorical theory can be applied to different forms of mad rhetoric in different media. These rhetorics do share some common features, however, and I have chosen them because of these commonalities. First, each of these creative works features a atmosphere of surrealism, a characteristic I believe many descriptive works of mad rhetorics have in common. Because a radically creative concept within a mad rhetoric radically distorts the form of a creation in a particular creative tradition and radically expands the creative possibilities of the form, I conjecture that representational mad rhetorics seem either partially surreal, as does the self-portrait by Van Gogh, or more wholly surreal, as do the works by Lovecraft and Lynch. Still, I believe it would be wrong to suggest that mad rhetorics are always colored by distorted realities, for mad rhetorics must be appreciable to others, and surreal rhetorics by their nature are in danger of tipping off into intellectual obscurity. Each of these three texts were chosen because it features surreal characteristics that makes the radical creativities located

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within more recognizable than if they were in a work that was less abstract.

A second characteristic these three works share in common is that they are all works of representation rather than works of demonstration, which is to say they are works of artistic creativity and not scientific or logical inquiry. While I submit that any particular work of Albert Einstein, Leonhard Euler or Sigmund Freud could be found to be mad rhetorical in nature, it is work that isn't firmly within the threshold of the literature of rhetorical studies. I assume that one day the study of rhetoric may become more interested in the analysis of the rhetoric of the technical fields beyond those it shares with the humanities, but for now I believe these works share a parallel position with other texts that the majority of rhetorical scholars have so far examined. Furthermore, I have feigned to analyze a work of direct rhetorical performance primarily because I believe these three texts to be more widely accessible by future scholars who would use this theory in their own work. There is certainly no reason why the performance of an extraordinary actor, speaker or comedian could not be mad rhetorical in nature, but such instances of mad rhetoric may not be as readily

accessible to the reader of this work as are the texts I have focused on. Along similar line, a mad rhetoric strictly found at the level of production is also possible, but I leave that to others to explore.

Thirdly, each of these mad rhetorics deals in some sense with the machinations that occur within the human mind. Again, I don't believe every mad rhetoric shares this theme in common, but I do believe that the fact that each of these mad rhetorics references the mind is worth noting in these inaugural applications of mad rhetorical critical theory. Because mad rhetorics involve the expression of ideas that are radically unique to the individual in ways others can understand, I believe it is important to demonstrate a number of different ways in which that transfer could be made in a fashion that directly references the fact that the rhetor is exposing their own unique thoughts. In the Van Gogh painting, the mad rhetoric is portrayed directly through a self-representation of the rhetor himself. In the story by Lovecraft, the reader is exposed to the music that comes directly from Zann's mad rhetorical state. Finally, in the film by Lynch, the mad rhetoric *is* a structural representation of a mind repackaged as a surreal film narrative. By understanding

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how intimately a radically creative work of art is tied to a particular aspect of the human condition, I have been able to demonstrate how mad rhetors are able to draw their audience through the labyrinth of their mad rhetorical creation straight to the origin of their radically creative work within a singular human mind.

Finally, I chose each of these texts because their creators each communicated frequently with others about their work. Ironically, Lynch, the only rhetor still alive, and thus the only one of the three with ability to currently record his thoughts about the creative process behind their work, is also the one who has been the least candid about their own personal creative process. Lynch has conducted many interviews and given a number of talks on the technical aspects of the production of *Eraserhead* (1977/2006), the hardships he endured during the long seven-year process, and his own experiences with those he worked with, but he has so far refrained from exposing the motivations behind his directorial and scriptwriting choices. Still, all three creators are able to offer my critical process precious autobiographical insight about many of the circumstances that surrounded the production of their mad rhetoric, a privilege that lends my mad

rhetorical research the convenience of quoting the mad

rhetor in regards to particular elements of their creative

process. It also allows me to demonstrate quite clearly

that while some mad rhetors experience problems with mental

and physical health over their lifetime, they are able to

communicate their thoughts in a cohesive matter that lends

itself to reference in posterity.

Critical Interrogations of Mad Rhetorics

After explaining the dynamics of mad rhetorical theory

and selecting the works I wished to analyze, I then applied

the critical approach I believed to be the most appropriate

to exposing the radically creative element within that

work. Each of these selections was taken from the work of

other established scholars and then applied to my specific

purposes. Some of these critical frameworks were altered

slightly to fit my specific needs, but every alteration

made was justified as appropriate to the search for my new

classification of the mad rhetoric and each transition was

made in the spirit of the original critical framework's

focus. Each of my analyses also featured a diegesis that

exposed the entire work as a text created to fit into a

particular genre of creative rhetoric, so that I might then

expose the mad rhetorics that lay inside of each of them,

With my analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's "The Music of

Erich Zann," I employed less "mechanistic" critical

protocols because I was attempting to demonstrate

Lovecraft's radically creative use of a portrayal of a mad

rhetor and his mad rhetoric within the corpus of

Lovecraft's own mad rhetoric. Furthermore, I attempted to

demonstrate how each of these radically creative components

of Lovecraft's story was both individually and

conjunctively notable as fictive agents within Lovecraft's

tale. I wished to demonstrate that Lovecraft wrote Zann and

his mad rhetoric as a depiction of a mad rhetorical

character in the "weird fiction" style, a distinction that

served my purposes as a critic demonstrating various uses

of radically creative ideas within creative works. At the

second level of my analysis, however, I demonstrated that

Lovecraft's depiction of Zann and his music was itself mad

rhetorical in nature. At this level, I was able to

demonstrate Zann and his music make up a radically creative

construct in the genre of "weird fiction." From the

theoretical standpoint, I was able to own my personal

interpretation as a White American fan of weird science

fiction, thus qualifying my own analysis as a member of one of an interpretative community as described by Stanley Fish (1980). I was also able to demonstrate how Lovecraft, using the character's travels toward the abode the mad rhetor Zann, twisted the world of the narrative from the representational to the radically abstract and from a world with real places and concerns (i.e. the narrator's need for a room) to a comprehensible level of surrealism where the musician Zann could transubstantiate into his own fevered playing to keep a hidden horror like the Window MacGuffin at bay. Finally, I discussed why this labyrinthine text was unique and radically creative even amongst Lovecraft's myriad of innovative texts and how Lovecraft was able to stretch the form of "weird fiction" through his use of a mad rhetorical musician to convey a unique form of plot device.

In my analysis of the self-portrait by Van Gogh (1889), I employed a schema for the analysis of visual rhetorics created by Sonja Foss (1994). With this self-portrait, I attempted to demonstrate how an artist might represent themselves in their own mad rhetorical state. First, I showed why I thought the painting conformed to the trope of the "self-portrait" and how it emulated the style

of representational self-portraiture that was dominant in
Van Gogh's time. Then I discussed how Van Gogh used
particular color hues and brushstrokes to portray himself
in the form of self-portrait as well as to hint that
another interpretation of the painting was possible using
the color as a key. I described how this secondary level of
meaning transformed the painting into a mad rhetoric as
well as how those dual meanings prove that the painting is
both a functionally sound self-portrait as well as a
dynamic mad rhetoric. I ended this section with a
discussion of why the painting was an exceptional work of
mad rhetorical design that has influenced many artists
since its creation.

In my final critique, I demonstrated how the film
Eraserhead (1977/2006) by David Lynch was an example of a
mad rhetoric presented strictly on one level of meaning, in
this case on the level of the narrative, and how that level
of meaning could alternately be perceived at the structural
level of meaning where components of its other level of
meaning are transmogrified the narrative into the form of a
structural mad rhetoric. In addition to my diegesis, I used
theoretical frameworks described by Janet Staiger (2000) to
analyze the receptive environment that the narrative

appeals to as a way in which to qualify how Lynch conveys

the mad rhetoric that carries a hidden, secondary level of

radically creative structural meaning to a viewer with

certain expectations regarding a surreal film. To explore

this structural meaning of the film, I then used a

derivation of a critical framework originally designed by

Vladimir Propp (1928/1962). Although I was not attempting

to compare the structure of the film to other works of its

kind, I found that Propp's morphological approach afforded

me the most direct and succinct method with which to

analyze what was essentially a two-dimensional rhetorical

construct recessed underneath an incredibly complex and

vibrant film. That Propp used this methodology only as a

way to analyze folktales only served to bolster my own

analysis of what was essentially a diametric shifting of

the live elements of the film into fantastic, figural

representations of parts of an unseen human psyche. I was

not attempting to establish a continuum of structural

similarities across a single genre as Propp was, so the

unique categorization I was able to establish served simply

to extenuate the unique mad rhetorical nature of the

structure itself. I ended this chapter by listing that a

number of other films resemble the film in some fashion. I

did this as a way to demonstrate the film's unique place in cinematic history as the only film able to achieve a panoptic secondary level of radically creativity meaning.

The Place of Mad Rhetorical Theory in Future Criticism

The three mad rhetorics I have examined here represent a mere microcosm of the multiplicity of mad rhetorics in existence across continuum of creative works that comprise the "world stage of ideas" I referred to in the introductory chapter. I selected them because they represent three important examples of the forms mad rhetorics take, but I recognize that they are still products of their individual genres and, as radical creativities, only expand those genres in one important fashion. Lynch redefined the way the unseen structure of a film's plot can completely subvert the meaning of a text, but there are other mad rhetorics in existence that subvert other elements of their creative fabric to make radically creative statements. For example, Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) tells a story remarkably similar is structure and plot of Ambroise Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1880), but it transformed Bierce's theme of a

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character interacting with his own death-throes in a state
of his own existential deconstruction into a parable about
the transitory nature of the human perception of tropes of
"good" and "evil." The point of this research, therefore,
was to inspire other critics of mad rhetorics to explore
works of creativity that they suspect might be mad
rhetorical in nature using critical frameworks they believe
can most accurately expose the mad rhetorics that may exist
within the work. Each of the texts I have analyzed here
also represents a different level of abstraction of an
individual mad rhetorical level of meaning and thus a
different form of demand on the critic seeking to criticize
that particular mad rhetoric's form. By offering three
different ways in which to conduct rhetorical research
using derivations of pre-existing critical frameworks, I
hope I have stressed to future critics of mad rhetorical
communication the need for critical flexibility and
practical application of one's own intuitive critical
instincts as one attempts to expose a particular mad
rhetoric's radically creative elements.

Starting with the most "obvious" instance of the
presence of a mad rhetoric, Lovecraft's Zann is readily
recognizable as a "weird" character and thus possibly a mad

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rhetor within the throes of his own mad rhetorical state,

Because the character is such an obvious candidate for mad

rhetorical analysis, the critic need not worry about

exploring whether they believe that a mad rhetorical

element exists within the creative work, and thus whether

their criticism will bear any analytical fruit, because

they have already come to the realization about what they

want to demonstrate exists therein . The critic of mad

rhetorics can therefore focus their search for a critical

framework on those rubrics they believe might best expose

it as such in their criticism. Also, because this kind of

mad rhetoric is so readily apparent, the critic who

succeeds in revealing its presence to their reader is

afforded more space in their analysis with which to

demonstrate how the mad rhetoric expands the creative

tradition it fit into and as well as the mad rhetor's own

creative legacy.

Van Gogh's painting (1889) presents not only a more

abstract form of a mad rhetoric than Lovecraft's story, but

also a form more invested with the identity of the mad

rhetor. Van Gogh's self-portrait (1889) shows a mad rhetor

in a deceptively more "normalized" state. Only when the

critic looks beyond the beautiful self-portrait and all of

its psychological-emotional gravitas does one see the possibility for a unique and precedential level of meaning, an identity that is only hinted at by the figure's general attitude. When the critic of mad rhetorics suspects that they have found this kind of candidate for mad rhetorical analysis, they can begin their search for an appropriate analytical framework with which to expose the particular radically creative component in the larger mad rhetoric. Subsequently, because the mad rhetoric is not as obvious to the trained eye, it also requires that the mad rhetorical scholar bend the critical frameworks they chose to employ further away from the very design that would have better because the critic is exploring an element of a creative work that is shifted even further away from the normal functions of rhetorical address than those on part with the kind of "blatant mad rhetoric" found in Lovecraft's work. In turn, these breaks from the established critical method will have to be explained, just as I had to disregard a portion of Foss's schema in order to imply the singularity of Van Gogh's mad rhetoric. Paradoxically, dealing as they do with the guidelines of a more rigid critical structure, the mad rhetorical critic in this situation is also allotted greater opportunity to employ outside support to

accentuate particular integral elements of the mad rhetoric
that set it apart from previous works of creation or that
garner the work special attention from its viewer. In
deviating in this manner from the rubric meant for the
assessment of "normal" acts of rhetorical address, the mad
rhetorical critic is able to diametrically showcase the
unique aspects of the mad rhetoric they are assessing. In
my analysis of Van Gogh's work, by stressing the innovative
way Van Gogh used color and swirling brushstrokes, I was
able to justify my deviation from Foss' schema by directly
demonstrating why Van Gogh's methods were so radically
creative and thus incomparable to the rhetorical methods
used in the creation of other non-mad rhetorical works that
bared similarities to the self-portrait's superficial
appearance. In my analysis, I also demonstrated how a
critic of mad rhetorics might isolate the ways in which a
mad rhetor incorporates their radical creativity into their
mad rhetoric and how a critic might attempt to identify
similar mad rhetorical tactics for further research.

The third work I analyzed here, *Eraserhead*
(1977/2006), takes the trend of mad rhetorics to obscure
their radical creativities to the most severe degree. In
presenting a level of meaning that is nearly completely

divorced from the action shown in the film, it is one of

the most difficult mad rhetorics to isolate, understand,

and, then, criticize. Whereas a mad rhetoric as blatant as

Lovecraft's can be analyzed relatively holistically and the

Van Gogh painting can be analyzed as a concordant element

of the work's total form, Lynch's film forces the critic of

mad rhetorics to employ completely parallel critical

methods in order to identify and criticize it as a creative

work and as the mad rhetoric that that work's components

metaphorically collapse into. Because it requires a

completely rigid critical framework to expose its radically

creative idea, my criticism is also demonstrative of the

variable paths critics working with mad rhetorical theory

will have to take in order to expose the many different

kinds of mad rhetorics that exist. In this sense, it is a

heuristic for both the location, demonstration and, then,

categorization of the extreme tactics mad rhetors have used

in communicating their unique, but still appreciable, mad

rhetorics.

The Existence of Mad Rhetorical Critical Frameworks
and a Comparative Mad Rhetorical Literature

As the theory is applied to the literature at large,

patterns in mad rhetorics or common tactics which mad

rhetors use in the communication of their radical

creativities may begin to emerge in the literature. These

patterns, such as the labyrinthine qualities I mentioned in

conjunction with my analysis of Lovecraft tale or the

"mirror-world" tesseract-like qualities of the Van Gogh

painting, may eventually call for scholars working with mad

rhetorical theory to develop mad rhetoric-specific critical

frameworks. It may be difficult to test those patterns due

to the highly original nature of each successive mad

rhetoric, but as a function of human rhetorical

communication there may be common, psycho-relational

features to be found within the many different instances of

mad rhetorics that expose unforeseen archives in the human

creative character. Analyzing the common creative tactics

and characteristics of these groups of mad rhetorics may

lead to development of subdivisions within the critical

literature and critical frameworks appropriate to that

literature. When these are established and as the theory

leads to further growth in the literature, scholars using

mad rhetorical theory will be able to perform intertextual investigations within the emergent mad rhetorical literature. In the process of this analysis and comparison of that literature, mad rhetorical scholars may be able to draw the closest composite possible of the human impulse to innovate at its most ingenious.

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