MAD THEORY
A Performance Philosophy Symposium

Saturday, April 12th, 9:30AM - 6:30PM
Madison Public Library Central Branch, Rm 301
Welcome to MAD THEORY, an experimental and dynamic time and space to demonstrate and discuss exciting new work! The symposium features diverse approaches to performance and philosophy: lecture performances, experimental talks, live art, interactive installations, roundtable discussions, durational work, and hybrid theory-practice sessions.

From an audio performance theorizing queer stammers and the glitch to a relational, food-based aesthetic gesture; from a trans-digital methodology of the handmade to a performative investigation of race in visual culture; from experimental theory videos to collaborative digital poetics; from philosophy of body modification to exploration of early literacy programs, MAD THEORY features a stunning range of interdisciplinary work!

Featuring a keynote presentation by Fusion Science Theatre.

MAD THEORY is presented by the Madison Performance Philosophy Collective with generous support from the A.W. Mellon Workshop on Art and Scholarship in Theory and Practice, The Bubbler at Madison Public Library, UW-Madison Center for the Humanities, and Performance Philosophy.

Q&A will occur at the end of each block for all of the presenters in that block.

Coffee and snacks will be served throughout the day, and lunch is provided on site. Please join us for meals and to continue the discussion.
Wandering through Taroko Gorge: A Crowd-Sourced Poetry Performance - In this combination of presentation and poetry reading, I'll present a remix of Nick Monfort's javascript poetry generator, “Taroko Gorge.” My remix added a musical component using a computer’s oscilloscope function, allows participant observers to answer prompts which are then pushed into to the poem in real-time. The poem will be available throughout the day, gradually adding all inputs to its total sum.

Race Decon - “Race Decon” is a feminist video art installation which seeks to explore and deconstruct social constructs surrounding race. Inspired by casta paintings and the artist's lived experience, by placing herself within two representational scenes, she attempts to confront the viewer’s perceptions of race, context and gender by changing her skin tones. Within the interactive installation component of the project, the artist welcomes participants to insert themselves within the two original scenes of “Race Decon” and have their photo taken with the intention of self-exploration of race and context, and as a way to both expand and become part of the project as a whole.
Historicizing Mad Theory - In my performance, I will test the boundaries of the methodological approach of history in which the historian acts as a “neutral” and “rational” observer who analyzes discourses and performances of historical actors. I will use Twitter to record my experiences at the symposium and attempt to find the “objective” or “factual.” However, at the same time, I may take up different subject positions in order to shift or to distort representations of the event and the experience of others.

The Office of Transcription, Translation and Transmutation - The Office of Transcription, Translation, and Transmutation provides professional assistance for the harried and handwriting-impaired. We understand that as a member of today’s busy, be-gadgetted society, you simply do not have the time or the patience to write letters by hand anymore. We have no doubt that your text messages are hilarious. Likewise, your tweets and Facebook posts are surely brilliant. But perhaps you lack the necessary skills to execute long, personal communications...sans keyboard and monitor? If so, please allow the Office of Transcription, Translation, and Transmutation to put its pen to paper for you.
Site Specificity and the Role of Cultural Etiquettes: Lights Out and Cafe Allongé in Performance -
In my performative presentation, I begin by introducing the participants to the space, a space that is already coded for certain behaviors, that communicates certain social cues and normative expectations in its very being. I then move to a description of two projects that both engaged with the notion of space’s social expectations: one, a play that I directed in which the audience inhabited the same space as the actors and the other, a one-on-one performance in which I tried to highlight the cultural coding being simultaneously performed and projected in a coffee shop.

Race Decon (Video) - “Race Decon” is a feminist video art installation which seeks to explore and deconstruct social constructs surrounding race. The artist utilizes her body as a site of examination to slowly disrupt the viewer’s internalized notions of race. Inspired by casta paintings and the artist’s lived experience, by placing herself within two representational scenes, she attempts to confront the viewer’s perceptions of race, context and gender by changing her skin tones. Utilization of split screen images, appearing like diptychs, mimic the way slides appear within an art history classroom, a deliberate reference to the study of art, and an effort to bring new meaning to notions of othered bodies.
(Hidden) Affinities - In the age of unprecedented consumerism, constant crisis, perpetual conflict, and immediate urgency to face the repressed reality of global warming, one is inevitably called upon to interrogate her position in the larger order of things. In the participatory performance “(Hidden) Affinities,” I question and invite the spectators to probe the (in)visible ethics that brings politics and desire together. Through visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory stimuli, the audience members are incited to sense and comprehend their unity with the world they are wasting by fulfilling desires that are rarely their own. Images by Anne McClintock.

Wandering through Taroko Gorge: A Crowd-Sourced Poetry Performance - In this combination of presentation and poetry reading, I’ll discuss the process of decoding html and javascript as a non-coder, describe some of my theories on participatory performance using computer interfaces, and raise questions about agency in performance and how a digital artifact can function as a poetic event.
**Imaginary Beings, Imaginary Audiences** - Drawing on Gregory Ulmer’s concept of “mystory,” Imaginary Beings, Imaginary Audiences will collage together research, theory, and performance to argue for a new moral and practical understanding of imaginary beings in and as performance. The presentation, conceived as a prolegomena, will encompass the presentation of documentation from and reflections on a project that bridges life and performance art: the presenter’s ongoing romantic relationship with the character Applejack from the television program My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, framed by comments from a variety of theoreticians. A symbolic reinterpretation in performance of an old urban legend will complement this material.

**Soft light creeps in from stage left. Tense plastic nets that caress and receive. (We recited possibilities aloud. We made charts.)** - The scene: two podiums; projection of jellyfish imagery behind the podiums; soft, dreamy light. Binaural beats play throughout the performance, slowly increasing in volume. In Part 1, “The Pleasure of the Text,” Snake and Reverend each stand behind a podium, giving an academic lecture about desire and textuality. In Part 2, “Your deepest desires are thick and textured, resonant and tender,” Reverend and Snake leave the lecterns, moving throughout the entire space of the room, transitioning from academic lecturers to religious cult leaders. In Part 3, “Anything for Love,” Meat Loaf’s song “I’d Do Anything for Love” begins to play...
**Chaos Reigns** - This video deals with Heidegger’s philosophy; but Heidegger’s thought is – inadvertently, for sure – backed by techno music. Heidegger, concerned with language and technologies, is savagely plunged in a world of “poor-in-world” animals. Of bloody animals. Of dying animals uttering silenced words that a man, lost in a forest, hallucinates as a political statement: “Chaos reigns” – his own disavowed voice. His unreproducible voice. If humans could talk, foxes would not understand them.
Fusing Demos, Drama, and Embodiment to Teach Big Ideas of Science - Fusion Science Theater is a cross-disciplinary organization that uses theatrical elements and techniques to create shows that invite the audience to learn through the performance experience. This presentation will discuss the adaptation and development of this methodology and demonstrate its use in the construction of a performance within a performance.

Q&A will follow during lunch

Lunch is provided free on site at the symposium.

But on your way in...

Still Life With Vegetables - It’s just before lunch. Molly and Chelsea stand behind a table covered in sweet things. The audience members enter. Each will be presented with a portrait of themselves. How long will it last? How quickly will we consume our art?
Moving & Making: Performance and Process in Childhood Literacy Programs - Join us in an exploration of a library early literacy program called Movers & Makers. We open with a brief description of the program and the setting in which we find ourselves every week at a small public library outside of Madison, and then move in to the interactive portion of the session with movement, dance, song, and play. Attendees are invited to grab a carpet square and participate and consider the following: is this a performance? What is the role of routine and comfort in childhood literacy spaces? What does it mean to lead or be lead during such an activity? How can the relationship between leader and audience be subverted, and should it be?

Speed Ideating - The outcome of a certain social circumstance — whether related to one’s work, personal relationships, or random everyday experience — can be dependent on a person’s ability to communicate well. Though, with this in mind, it is important to note that each person processes the information with which they are presented differently, and, subsequently, how they are able to reflect what they understand through what they say will be different. In this workshop, participants are invited to explore their own experience in conversation when the normal social confines have been stripped away, and all you are left with is a stranger sitting across from you, a question, and two minutes.
Being and Timing: Hamlet, Heidegger and Thinking About Death - This presentation will begin with an academic reading of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy followed by a theatrical performance of a selection from Heidegger. Afterward we will discuss both the meaning of both texts, and the influence of the way in which they were introduced. My suggestion is that in this case Heidegger is dealing with a more dramatic vulnerability, and that exploring the ideas through the form as well as content will help uncover important philosophical claims about the human relationship to and understanding of death.
The Face is the Mask: Global Modifications of Body and Soul - I am a tenured professor of French who has been a devoted body modification artist for more than 20 years. I am halfway through a full Japanese-style bodysuit tattoo, am heavily and visibly pierced, have silicone injected in my genitals and upper-body, remove the hair from my head, and grow a long, full beard. I have collected these bodily changes all over the world, from my prince Albert done in Boston in, to my Japanese-style tattoos done in the US and Switzerland, to my body reshaping done in Mexico. Although unique and inhabited only by me, my body is a nexus of the various identities, cultures, and genders that I chose or am obliged to perform; it is, in a sense, an expression of the world in which I exist, and also an expression of my self. I have chosen to make it so, legibly.
I saw I ere I was I - On a fall day in 2005, Rip Stokes, my elderly neighbor, held a knife to my throat on account of a rather benign feminist protest sign hanging in my front window. So began a series of regressive responses, ranging from unproductive conversations to the stealing of Mr. Stokes's birdfeeders. “I saw I ere I was I” investigates regression, movement, memory, cooperation, and repentance. Using palindromic language, the projection of reversed video, the backwards completion of tasks, and personal narrative, this performance takes audiences through the performer’s various lifetime regressions.

PowerPaint: Lessons from a Trans-Digital Gouache Experiment to Transform A Conference Talk and Reduce Modern Dysphoria - What happens when you paint the slides for your conference talk? This session expands outward from my talk at a Digital Gender workshop at Umeå University, where painted slides tested the role of the human hand in the mind-body ‘problem’ of transgender, digital, and/or academic living. Do you too have “digital dysphoria”—a sense of mismatch between material and metaphor, a feeling of being fragmented across media? When it comes to navigating modern in-betweenities, where can the hand as interface lead? Join me in bridging queer theory and art-as-research to imagine a trans-digital methodology of the handmade.
The Secret to Theory is a Good Set of Subwoofers - Does theory have a proper sonic range and, if so, what is its relation to institutional histories and environmental forces? How have cultural values of voice, melody, and clarity shaped the installation of treble-range speakers in schools and conference centers to the near exclusion of bass-range subwoofers? What can we read in this pattern or infrastructural rhythm? And might the future of high theory lie in the bottom, in its base bass beat? Such a premise informs a series of videos that mix theory and music, ideation and spectacle and draw on 20th-century experimental theory and avant-garde film practices.
Sonic interruptions & noise channels: the voice, stammers, and glitch - In my recent work that investigates multiple systems of communication and information, I am interested in how such streams of data and material can be disrupted and “cracked” through improbable layering and forced collisions. Creating such collisions and fissures that instantiate themselves as “noise signals” within a broader system that seeks unmediated, noiseless communication, my works for voice, electronics, text, and performance highlight the complex nature of communicating that problematize notions of “clarity” within multiple media. As these interruptions build upon a (conceptual) framework of constraint, this performative lecture pushes the boundaries of the systems that contain them to forge unexpected vocabularies of resistance.

Thanks again to our generous sponsors, supporters, presenters, performers, friends and all who helped make this symposium possible!