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This article uses the ideas of 'strategy' and 'tactics' drawn from Michel de Certeau's The Practice of Everyday Life *in order to examine two specific Scottish performances and determine their conception of mental illness, their approach to performance, and how these performances relate to the structures surrounding them. The first,* The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, was written by Anthony Neilson, premièred at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2004, and was directly supported by the Scottish Executive's National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well Being. The second,* Does Anyone Know*, is a short film resulting from work with prisoners with mental health problems in the High Dependency Unit at HMP Edinburgh by the charity Theatre NEMO, and includes performances by prisoners themselves. Taken together, these performances give some sense of the contingent position of performances of mental illness, the ways in which actors, writers, and service users act within the structures of theatres, prisons, and hospitals, to work around and within the 'strategies' which constitute psychiatric discourse.*

Keywords: mental illness, Theatre NEMO, Anthony Neilson, Michel de Certeau, tactics

Introduction: concepts, productions

In the early twenty-first century, mental illness has attracted widespread news coverage in the United Kingdom, from its apparently increasing prevalence (O'Brien, 2012; Randerson, 2007), to the (in)effectiveness of medication (McRae, 2006). Over the same period, a number of performances in various modes have engaged with similar ideas. In Scotland specifically, this increasing interest and concern (including a number of articles in *The Scotsman* regarding mental health stigma and the 'Gulag like' conditions in Carstairs State Hospital (Anon., 2004)) has been combined with a thoroughgoing reappraisal of mental health policy in the wake of The Scotland Act 1998. This makes the Scottish context a key site for examining how approaches to mental illness in performance engage with issues of representation, politics, and power, as well as how institutional frameworks affect and shape these issues.

This article examines two Scottish performances to determine their conception of mental illness, their approach to performance, and the relation of these performances to the structures surrounding them. Michel de Certeau's idea of 'tactics', found in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), provides a framework for thinking about the actions taken by individuals within institutional spaces. Such actions repurpose institutional materials and discourses, providing a way of 'making do' within the institution while retaining full awareness of its greater power. De Certeau's work remains influential, and indeed has become more so in the Anglophone world during the early years of the twenty-first century. His work has been the subject of a 2001 special issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, and, along with that of Emmanuel Levinas, forms a key element in James Thompson's (2010) influential reconsideration of applied theatre work, *Performance Affects*.

In order to provide the broadest possible overview of

approaches while retaining a specificity of examples, I will examine two contrasting performances. The first, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2007), was written by Anthony Neilson, premièred at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2004, and was directly supported by the Scottish Executive's National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well Being. Featuring professional actors, and forming part of one of the most well-known theatre festivals in the world, *Dissocia* is situated at the heart of the theatrical establishment. The second, a workshop, performance, and short film facilitated by the charity Theatre NEMO (2008a) involving inmates of Edinburgh Prison with mental health problems, reflects the other end of the performance spectrum—localised, amateur, and focused as strongly on affecting individual participants as on broader discursive impact. Taken together, these examples give some sense of the contingent position of performances of mental illness, the ways in which actors, writers, and service users act within the structures of theatres, prisons, and hospitals to work around and within the 'strategies' which constitute psychiatric discourse.

Tactics: de Certeau and Foucault

Michel Foucault's analysis of the functioning of power within medical institutions begins with *Madness and Civilization* (2001). The general thrust of Foucault's (2006, p.345) approach can be summarised by the following statement from his lectures on psychiatric power: 'power relations constituted the *a priori* of psychiatric practice [...] what was essentially involved in these power relations was the absolute right of nonmadness over madness'. In essence, Foucault identifies privileged structures of power and knowledge, equivalent to those procedures which de Certeau refers to as 'strategies':

> The calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment'. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper (propre)* and thus serve as a basis for generating relationships with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clientèles', 'targets', or 'objects' of research (de Certeau, 1988, p.xix).

In the case of mental illness and psychiatric power, the institutions of government, clinic, asylum, and prison all act strategically, generating relationships with and between citizens, patients, and inmates which form a 'grid' of power. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), as well as in *Psychiatric Power* (2006), Foucault (2006, p.4) traces how mechanisms based on constant visibility (panopticism being a case in point) break free from the institutions which generated them, and become broader principles of power which exist only 'because there is dispersion, relays, networks, reciprocal supports, differences of potential, discrepancies'[1].

For de Certeau, this approach is both productive and limited. While he accepts the existence of this 'grid' of power, de Certeau (1988, p.xiv) is concerned that Foucault's approach 'privileges the productive apparatus', and leaves open the question of 'how we should consider other, equally infinitesimal, procedures, which have not been "privileged" by history but are nevertheless active in innumerable ways in the openings of established technological networks' (de Certeau, 1988, p.49). In other words, given that such disciplinary technologies exist, 'it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to [them]' (de Certeau, 1988, p.xiv). In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1988, p.xv) attempts this discovery through analyses of the quotidian actions of individuals which 'compose the network of an antidiscipline'.

Although this 'antidiscipline' could be conceptualised simply as the resistant actions whose existence enables Foucault's later conception of a 'strictly relational' (Foucault, 1978, p.95) power to operate, de Certeau's specific focus is on those individual, minuscule actions which, although they exist within disciplinary technologies, cannot be reduced to those technologies. De Certeau (1988, p.37) calls an autonomous action by an individual or small group a 'tactic': 'a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus'. As an example, he cites '*la perruque*', a 'wig', or (in Fredric Jameson's translation) a 'rip-off'', (de Certeau, Jameson and Lovitt, 1980, p.3) which is 'the worker's own work disguised as that of his employer' (de Certeau, 1988, p.25)—making personal phone calls during company time, or using offcuts to make furniture for their family. It can also include the creation of purely non-functional objects, made solely for amusement. Michael Sheringham (2006, p.213) characterises this kind of activity as 'productive consumption': 'If consumers are subject to manipulation [...] they also manipulate the material they receive'.

While de Certeau (1988, p.xx) identifies the practices of 'reading, talking, dwelling, cooking' as exemplary tactical actions, *performing*, in its ephemerality and contingent relationship to texts and space, tends to be as tactical as these exemplars. Indeed, within the strategies of others, many tactical actions which are not 'performance' (in the sense of a planned artistic event) still involve a dual movement; of overt performance of and within the strategic order (consumption), and of the 'clever tricks' (de Certeau, 1988, p.xix) which seize the opportune moment to produce something new and transient within that space. The performer tactically appropriates the material of the texts they perform, as the text's author appropriated their source material, and as each audience member will appropriate the 'text' of the living performance. A different world (the performer's) slips into the author's place, but only as long as the performance takes place, after which the text returns,

anonymous, like a rented apartment before the next tenants move in (de Certeau, 1988, p.xxi).

If a tactical action must 'turn to [its] own ends forces alien to [it]' (de Certeau, 1988, p.xix), we must first get some sense of what these alien forces, this 'text' of mental illness, might be. For the purposes of this paper, the Scottish Executive's mental health policy, elaborated in a number of documents beginning with the *National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being: Action Plan* (Scottish Executive, 2003), provides a privileged location for such an examination, since, as Lydia Lewis (2005, p.86) argues, policy documents occupy an unstable position, since they 'both reflect and construct the practices with which they are concerned'. Since they exist as reference texts for 'official' discourse about mental illness in Scotland, these documents elaborate a strategy to be appropriated by tactical actions, turned to the purposes of any individual or group who may be, however briefly, inhabiting, or moving within, the conceptual spaces of mental illness.

Partly as a result of the institutional structures of the Scottish Executive itself, the National Programme situates a conceptual break within the discourse of mental health. A 2005 report, emerging from questions raised at the 'Equal Minds' conference which took place soon after the 2003 launch of the National Programme, appeals to the concept of 'mental well-being', partly in order to avoid a strictly bio-medical focus on 'illness'[2]: 'There is a general agreement that mental health is more than an absence of mental illness [...] The definition of mental health as a "positive sense of well-being" challenges the idea that mental health is the opposite of mental illness' (Myers, McCollam, and Woodhouse 2006, p.18). In this definition, 'mental illness' remains in the realm of bio-medical science, a hard stop where the continuum of 'well-being' ends and one becomes, in Susan Sontag's (1991, p.3) phrase, a 'citizen of that other

place'—the 'kingdom of the sick'. Health is no longer defined simply as 'a lack of illness', but illness is defined, all the more rigorously, as a 'lack of health'.

Repurposings: tactical appropriations in *Dissocia*

The conceptual break between health and illness is echoed in the 'particularly unusual structure' of *Dissocia* (Anon., 2007); the interval reflects the moment of diagnosis. This structure functions by fracturing the expected narrative; prior to the interval, the play is a conventional fantasy quest in which the protagonist, Lisa, is transported from a contemporary, realist, milieu into a fantastical realm. Overt references to well-known plays and novels increase the audience's sense of familiarity; the song 'Welcome to Dissocia' owes a structural and lyrical debt to 'The Merry Old Land of Oz', and the 'scapegoat', in literalising and embodying a conventional concept, is a direct descendant of Lewis Carroll's March Hare. Act II, however, reveals Lisa to be a psychiatric patient, her medication-induced drowsiness standing in stark contrast to her position as 'Queen Sarah' at the close of Act I.

Diagnosis is a key feature of the strategies which surround mental illness, marking the point at which both medical and (in certain cases) judicial power can be exercised over the individual within the law. However, in Neilson's tactical appropriation of this key structural element of mental health discourse, its function is reversed. Although, in its most banal sense, the diagnosis still marks the point at which medical power is exercised, within *Dissocia* this moment, coming at the start of Act II, also reflects the point at which the colourful excitement of Lisa's psychosis is replaced by the banality of 'everyday life'. Neilson has stated that the play specifically addresses the question of 'why people who are mentally ill find it difficult to take their

medication' (quoted in Cavendish, 2004), and as a result the moment of diagnosis is tactically reimagined, not as the beginning of a process of recovery but as the end of an enjoyable experience. However momentarily, Neilson wants his audience to experience the sense of loss he sees as a possible result of psychiatric medication.

This tactical use of psychiatric discourse is also present in Christine Entwhistle's performance of Lisa's madness. In much the same way as the language used on stage is citational, bearing inevitable intertextual relationships to previous plays and works of literature, the physical gestures used by actors also conjure images of their previous uses. Entwhistle's involvement with the project forms part of a long association with Neilson which began with a 1994 Edinburgh Festival Fringe one-woman show written by Entwhistle entitled *The Woman in the Attic*. In an interview with *The Herald* newspaper Entwhistle makes a direct connection between *Dissocia* and the earlier collaboration, saying that as a result of their work on *The Woman*, Neilson 'knows I can do mad, so that probably helps' (quoted in Cooper, 2007). This expectation of recognisable stage madness, the ability to 'do mad', draws attention to the traditions within which theatrical representations of madness exist, traditions which involve a sense of the body as uncontrollable. One seminal example of this, discussed by Judith Wechsler, is Harriet Smithson's performance of Ophelia in Paris in 1871: 'Miss Smithson has a wealth of mannerisms, a disjunction of movement, an irregularity, one might even say a disconnectedness of gesture and words. One believes that she'll finish with convulsions' (quoted in Wechsler, 2002, p.202).

Such conventional representations rest on the assumption that disordered minds are externally reflected in disordered bodies. This tendency is emphasised by Petra Kuppers (2003, p.130):

> A general problem with working towards an aesthetic that tries to find spaces for the unknowable is that the 'other' too quickly becomes fixed into otherness [...] it is too easy to allow the spectators to see the performers as 'mad' and to see the traces of that 'madness' evidenced on their bodies.

However, it is this very recognisability which is tactically appropriated in Entwhistle's performance. The published playtext, being a transcript of the original production (Neilson, 2007), provides a sense of the blocking as performed, and hence of the connection between Entwhistle's performance and previous 'disordered' performances. In scene iv of Act II, we find her 'dancing manically around the room, on the bed, everywhere' (Neilson, 2007, p.78). Although this restates an image of madness in 'traces' on Lisa's body, the contrast between this dance, ending as it does with her '*crumpl[ing] to the floor, in tears*' (Neilson, 2007, p.79), and the dangerous excitement of *Dissocia* itself, provides the audience with a 'reason' for her dancing in her desire to recapture this state of excitement. The result is a momentary disruption of the sense of 'otherness' Kuppers (2003) sees as a risk in such representations.

Such appropriations are, of course, transient. The institutional theatre spaces within which *Dissocia* was performed place the production itself in a complex relationship with the strategic discourses it appropriates. Theatres themselves can be seen, along with prisons and hospitals among other spaces, as what Foucault (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p.24) calls 'heterotopias': 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which [...] all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'. Particularly contested is the ownership of particular performances, and the meanings they are given. For de Certeau (1988, p.xix), a key feature of the tactic is its precise temporal nature: 'what [it]

wins, it does not keep'. This is particularly the case for performances within theatres—after the lights have gone down on a particular performance, the ephemera which remain become material for the tactics of others, or even for recuperation within the economic strategies of the theatre itself. Nevertheless, these minuscule, tactical, uses of foreign materials occurred, allowing actors and audiences alike to, briefly, find a way of dwelling within Lisa's (Neilson's) story, of constructing moments of resistance from the very body of psychiatric discourse.

Infiltrations: Theatre NEMO's tactics

When performance moves from the respectably theatrical institutional space of national theatres and international festivals into the more contingent world of the prison, its ability to inhabit space is decreased. It must be *more* tactical, *more* cunning. James Thompson (2001, p.2), co-founder of the Theatre in Prisons and Probation Centre, reports his own, idealistic, response to the first suggestion that he facilitate performance within prisons: 'once we enter that space we collude with the oppressive practices within it'. This fear is understandable, insofar as the prison sets itself up as an unassailable space of strategy and discipline. De Certeau's ideas provide some tools to explore how tactical actions characterise ways of being even in such apparently totalising spaces.

For Thompson (2001, p.3), the 'performance' in a prison setting begins from the moment facilitators meet prison staff to explain what they will do: 'It was all practice. Of course it adapted, shifted and was sensitive to different audiences but in the early years of my experience in this work we constantly performed'. Even gaining access to the prison space requires the tactical appropriation of the language of the institution, performing the role of being 'on

the side of' the prison staff, even though the work itself will be with and for prisoners.

Theatre NEMO's own ability to tactically perform this language can be seen in their statement of 'Aims' relating to a project in Barlinnie Prison in 2009:

> While working with prisoners our aim is to have positive impact on the rehabilitation of prisoners in order to create happier and safer communities [...] we try to develop all the soft skill [*sic*] like communication, negotiation, confidence in learning and positive recreational activity (McCue, 2009, p.1).

The references to rehabilitation, community safety, and 'positive' activity here are precisely the language of the prison system, with its combination of punishment and reform. The reader of this extract would never realize Theatre NEMO was set up by Isabelle McCue after her son, John, committed suicide in Barlinnie after being convicted for an assault committed while experiencing mental illness, during which he mistook a father attempting to sit his struggling son in a car for an attempted abduction. McCue and Theatre NEMO do not hide the inspiration behind their work, but they recognize that, in order to improve the treatment of prisoners with mental illnesses, they must act tactically, move in spaces which are not theirs, appropriate the language of those who didn't 'seem very interested' (Carrell, 2006) in investigating the circumstances of John's death.

It should be clear from this that the tactical actions of Theatre NEMO are the precondition for any of the performances which result from their work in prisons. However, individual service users also shaped these representations, not only through their specific

contributions, but also through their own tactical actions. The facilitators noted that:

> [N]umbers started to drop and we found out that there was a lot of bullying going on in the halls regarding the workshops [...] it was said that because we were working with people from the high dependency unit there was a stigma attached to the work we were doing (Theatre NEMO, 2008b, p.2).

In the face of bullying, the decision to attend, or not to attend, workshops is a particularly strong example of the kind of tactical choice related to the art of surviving in prison—is the opportunity afforded by the workshops worth the additional bullying that participation in these workshops leads to? If, as Thompson (2001) argues, theatre work in prisons demands constant performance from the facilitators, the tactical decisions to be involved, or not to be involved, also require performances on the part of inmates and service users.

With this in mind, we can approach the specific representational tactics which are in evidence in *Does Anyone Know*. The possible risks involved in service users putting themselves on stage, that the '"other" too quickly becomes fixed into otherness' (Kuppers, 2003, p.130), are minimised by the inclusion of a member of prison staff (who remains unidentified) in the group of performers. This destabilises the sense of 'knowability' which might result from a cast made-up entirely of service users—the audience, at least for the short film, cannot know who is 'really' mentally ill, and who is 'just acting'. From this position, which is both displayed and disguised, the performers in *Does Anyone Know* engage directly with psychiatric power from the outset, communicating vividly the experience of existing in a subservient relationship to it. The design, reminiscent of an interrogation room with its single

overhead light bulb, reminds the viewer that the speakers are not just mental health service users, but also prisoners of the criminal justice system. While the subject is clearly visible, any figures outside the small, lit area are rendered invisible, producing a kind of inverse panopticon, where the actor is the focus of the gaze of any number of possible observers.

This is the position of the subject of psychiatric power—alone, and under constant, unsolicited observation. This is emphasised by the submissive positions of the actors, shoulders slouched, hands lowered. Even their voices are subdued as they address the audience from their compromised position. The submissiveness of the actors' postures can be seen as an expression of the 'inability to take space' noted by Kuppers (2003, p.125) in her own work with service users, a phenomenon which can be connected to de Certeau's (1988) observation that those who must act tactically are placed in that position because they lack a proper place from which to act. These postures draw attention to the 'lack of physical and mental privacy' (Kuppers, 2003, p.125) which characterises life in institutions such as prisons and hospitals in which the individual's right to personal autonomy is removed and replaced by the demands of the institution—the extent to which service users find 'no space for themselves, their bodies, their movements in their social and physical environments' (Kuppers, 2003, p.125) is the extent to which institutional power has acted on them.

However, in the depressed affect of the performers, this absence of a proper space is performed, making a tactical use of the contingent position of the participants within the panoptic structure. The ability to reshape their institutional context, to make a position of weakness into a position of (artistic) strength, is partly due to the creation of a temporary space within the prison: the chapel (a 'found', or

'poached', space). The very act of appropriating space draws attention to the 'productive consumption' involved in the production—the discourses of the prison which are tactically deployed in order for the film to be made in the first place are also those which are subjected to scrutiny in the film itself. Also important to the film's effect is the temporary breaking down of the boundary between prisoner, service user, facilitator, and prison staff. This boundary breaking is itself possible due to the tactical efforts of Theatre NEMO to create within the prison a temporary space in which the rules of the institution are suspended, for a short period, with the blessing of the very institution whose materials are appropriated. Theatre NEMO thus 'conform to [institutional structures] only in order to evade them' (de Certeau, 1988, p.xiv), speaking the language of the prison in such a way as to facilitate a representation of confinement by service users themselves, which provides a critique of their own situation.

Conclusion: poaching

Despite these moments of tactical action which, in Kuppers' (2003, p.6) words, 'insert the sliver of difference into the safe spaces of "normality"', it must also be recognised that the very ubiquity of tactical action ensures that appropriations and reappropriations will continue to follow on each others' heels. If to read is to 'poach' (de Certeau, 1988), to be both manipulated and to manipulate, then the *perruques* which result from one tactical action can be ripped off in turn by other readers.

At Theatre NEMO's tenth anniversary celebrations in 2010, Cabinet Secretary for Justice Kenny MacAskill MSP made a speech including the following statements:

> [W]e need to challenge them to take responsibility, nobody makes you drink it, nobody forces you to inject it, at the end of the day the person who's got to stand up and take responsibility is that individual [...] we can motivate, mobilise those who currently are languishing in their home, depressed or whatever else, and we can make this a better country (MacAskill, 2010)

MacAskill's focus on personal responsibility, coupled with a rhetoric which posits mental illhealth as personal weakness, is at odds both with the multi-faceted analysis of criminality and mental illhealth presented in *Does Anyone Know* and the anti-stigma constructions employed by the Scottish Executive as a whole. This approach fits with a tendency towards 'responsibilisation' identified by social work researcher Sarah Banks (2011, p.15): 'the focus on the individual service-user or family can [...] make it easier to locate blame and responsibility for the causes of problems with individuals, rather than with structural inequalities'.

MacAskill's speech is an example of the tactical assembly of reactionary political argument from the liberal strategies set out in the National Programme and Theatre NEMO's own tactical appropriation of the discourses of the prison. The potential for such appropriations is increased by those products of performance which have a life beyond the moment of the tactic—the film, the playscript, the photographs, the policy documents and the newspaper articles. As space wins out over time, what is won by tactical action is given up, to be used tactically by others, or kept by the strategic systems within which it was appropriated as a *perruque*.

Nonetheless, if de Certeau's approach to activity within power structures can tell us anything, it is that the existence of such structures, the knowledge that any tactical action takes place only insofar as space, time, and materials can be

'ripped off' from the structures to which they belong, is not a reason for despair. The moments of disruption within *Dissocia*, and the briefly-colonised space within Edinburgh Prison, are testament to the ability of performers, whether professional actors or amateur performer-inmates, to create hybrid representations, combining in one body the weight of psychiatric power which circumscribes some of the activity of people diagnosed with mental illness, and the potential for tactical action within or against that role. In early twenty-first century Scotland, representations of mental illness have the potential to be at once iterations of the system of psychiatric power, proof of that system's limitations, and texts from which future performers, patients, writers and inmates can 'poach', and within which they can find 'spaces for games and tricks', (de Certeau, 1988, p.174) spaces in which, tactically, to briefly construct their own representations, their own ways of 'making do'.

Notes

1. This account focuses on Foucault's earlier work, since this sense of an all-pervasive system in which 'the humanistic ideas of the Enlightenment were transformed into a set of procedures dominated by the idea of keeping human bodies under control through a "biopouvoir" exerted by panoptic surveillance' (Sheringham, 2006, p.217) is what de Certeau was explicitly responding to. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault develops a more nuanced account of power which sees it as 'strictly relational' (1978, p.95), so that resistance becomes an intrinsic part of power *per se*. Although this is closer to de Certeau's account of quotidian actions as productive consumption, Foucault still privileges highly contested sites such as sexuality, whereas de Certeau searches for the tactical actions which emerge within the most banal of situations, including walking and reading.

2. After all, individual policy-makers and politicians also act tactically, and the model of mental well-being allows the Scottish Executive to claim that social policy can 'prevent' mental illness—something a stricter application of the bio-medical paradigm, in which medical practitioners have unique expertise in treating a biologically grounded 'brain disease', would preclude.

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CHRISTOPHER DINGWALL-JONES is currently in his final year of PhD study at the University of Kent, having previously studied English at the University of Oxford and European Theatre at the University of Edinburgh. His research focuses on the representation of psychic distress in recent British theatre, with special interest in questions of embodiment and space, as well as the ways in which representing psychic distress on stage can disrupt all three concepts: representation, madness, and theatre. He has given conference papers exploring Marat/Sade, feminism and mental illness, and the ways acting challenges a dualistic approach to psychic distress.