

The Mad Maps Project: Mad Praxis and Digital Performance

Alexis Riley, Molly Roy, and Angenette Spalink

Abstract: *This article locates performance creation as a strategy for enacting mad praxis. We begin by offering an overview of popular notions of madness, paying careful attention to spatial metaphors that position madness as “out there” and, therefore, beyond the realm of politics. In response, drawing on sources in mad studies, disability studies, and disability performance practice, we counter this depoliticization by positioning madness as a meaningful social location from which to perceive and intervene in the politics of space. Taking the question, “Where is madness?” as a point of departure, we then put this framework into action through performative, polyvocal analysis of our collaborative digital performance, The Mad Maps Project. Weaving together theoretical analysis, embodied inquiry, and critical reflection, we argue that, when approached as a form of mad praxis, performance offers powerful tools for conceptualizing and conveying mad experiences and their political effects.*

keywords: madness, madden, disability, space, performance, praxis, digital performance, performative writing

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly remapped space. Schools closed, libraries shut down, and theaters dimmed their lights. For folks unaccustomed to confinement, this sudden contraction of accessible space was nothing short of jarring. “I’m going stir crazy,” friends exclaimed. “This apartment is driving me nuts.” “I have lost my mind.” As artist-scholars creating performances about mental disability and distress, we quickly found ourselves overwhelmed by the frequency of these and similar invocations; madness, in our experience, came to function as a defining metaphor for pandemic life, particularly as it related to space.

While often asserted casually, these metaphors are not benign; rather, they are embedded within a deeper cultural imaginary. For example, theatre scholar anna six (formerly Harpin) notes that madness has long been described as a spatial phenomenon; as the aforementioned examples demonstrate, one *goes* crazy. Thus, “there is a recurrent state of journeying that attends madness,” she writes, arguing that “the dominant notion of place renders ‘mad’ experience as an inherently geographical encounter. Madness, then, is figured as a location, as site.”¹ In interrogating these metaphors, six ultimately draws attention to the way that language associated with madness—however metaphorical or hyperbolic—functions performatively, interpellating those who experience what is currently termed mental illness as “out there,” located beyond the geographic borders of

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¹ Anna Harpin, “Dislocated: Metaphors of Madness in British Theatre,” in *Performance, Madness and Psychiatry: Isolated Acts*, eds. Anna Harpin and Juliet Foster (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 187.

normative reality and, therefore, unable to participate in its governance.² Our use of words like “mad,” “madness,” and “mad people” throughout this essay is intended to underscore and contest this interpellation. Throughout, we follow mad activists and mad studies scholars who use these reclaimed terms to frame mental disability and distress “not only as medical conditions but also as historical formations” shaped, in part, by cultural production—including performance.³

At the same time, attending critically to the relationship between madness and space opens up new trajectories for performance-based inquiry, trajectories we explore in this essay. To say that one *goes* mad implies action, shifting focus away from madness as a diagnosis and towards madness as a doing. Echoing the subversive impulses underpinning verbs like queer or crip, we are interested in how those who experience mental disability and distress might act on—-that is to say, *madden*—space, rearranging spatial vocabularies as a form of performance-based knowledge production. Here, we extend six’s formulation: in addition to attending to spatial metaphors as a means to apprehend madness, we are primarily invested in madness as a means to apprehend space, asking: If those who experience mental disability and distress “go mad,” where, exactly do we/they go? What might we learn from mapping a journey through madness? What geographies might we encounter, and how might these geographies shape our thinking? In other words:

Rather than asking *what* is madness, might we instead ask:
where is madness?

Our essay responds to these questions through analysis of our devised digital performance, *The Mad Maps Project* (2021). Throughout, we argue that madness, as a lived experience, functions as a meaningful social location from which to perceive and intervene in the politics of space. Performance practice offers potent tools for staging these interventions, its embodied and affective methods well-

² For a more thorough discussion of the relationship between madness and performatives, consult Jon Venn. “Theatres of Mental Health.” *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre and Science*, ed. Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2020), 116-31.

³ Tanja Aho, Liat Ben-Moshe, and Leon J. Hilton, “Mad Futures: Affect/Theory/Violence,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2017): 291–302. For more on madness and the emergent discipline of mad studies, consult Brenda A. LeFrançois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, eds. *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc, 2013).

suiting to the unconventional grammars of mad experience. When approached as a form of mad praxis, then, performance not only conveys mad people's individual and collective insights; performance also creates space to act on those insights, positioning those who experience mental disability and distress as engaged in political acts of mad knowledge production, all while inviting audiences to take up mad epistemologies.

Our interest in performance as a form of mad praxis stems, in part, from mad studies and performance studies scholars and artists who, like six, offer methodological frameworks for thinking through the intersections of madness and space. For example, in her writings on what she terms "the mad border body," mad studies scholar Shayda Kafai analyzes her embodied experience of madness through the lens of critical race and queer theory, arguing that mad bodies fluidly inhabit an in-between space located between total sanity and total madness.⁴ This liminality is reflected in mad studies scholar LaMarr Jurelle Bruce's work on Black madness. For Bruce, attending to resonances of Black and mad spaces yields what he describes as a *mad methodology*, "a mad ensemble of epistemological modes, political praxes, interpretive techniques, affective dispositions, existential orientations, and ways of life" that "recognizes madpersons as critical theorists and decisive protagonists in struggles for liberation."⁵ This liminality gestures towards performance, and while both Kafai and Bruce engage in performance analysis, as scholars, they do not enact this analysis through performance creation—and understandably so. To ask questions about performance creation as a form of mad praxis risks reproducing troubling associations between madness and creativity that continue to haunt our discipline, associations invested in presenting an imagined spectacle of madness for public consumption with no consideration for the political realities experienced by mad artists themselves. At the same time, as performance artists and scholars Petra Kuppens, Stephanie Heit, April Sizemore-Barber, V. K. Preston, Andy Hickey, and Andrew Wille demonstrate, confronting these legacies head-on can not only challenge the power of these associations, it can also yield compelling insights.⁶ For example, their

⁴ Shayda Kafai. "The Mad Border Body: A Political In-betweeness." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33.1 (2013): n.p.

⁵ LaMarr Jurelle Bruce, who approaches madness as a meaningful social location and mode of knowledge production. For more, consult La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 9.

⁶ For more on *The Asylum Project*, consult Petra Kuppens, et al., "Mad Methodologies and Community Performance: *The Asylum Project* at Bedlam." *Theatre Topics* 26.2 (2016): 221-

performance piece, *The Asylum Project*, activates lived experiences of madness and disability as a starting point for excavating the asylum and its histories. In doing so, their work points to the value of performance as mad praxis, one that centers mad people as authors (as opposed to only subjects) of meaning. Further, it leaves room for expanding the range of this praxis by moving away from sites associated with madness towards a consideration of seemingly non-mad spaces.

Produced amidst the ongoing spatial upheavals of the pandemic, *Mad Maps* took these insights as a point of departure, bringing together thirteen artists who identified with or in relation to madness to explore the “where” of madness through engagement with one quotidian space: the grocery store. Beginning in March 2021, thirteen contributing artists received a mystery package in the mail, each containing a single food item with terms such as “mad,” “crazy,” or “insane,” in its product name. Artists then crafted responses to these items, deploying monologue, dance, poetry, photography, and videography as modes of mad inquiry. Further, understanding mad people in relation to the larger disability community, contributors also experimented with incorporating audiovisual descriptions into their performances, accounting for the multisensory experience of objects and space while increasing accessibility.⁷ These products and their associated performances were then arranged side-by-side on the *Mad Maps* website, which serves as a facsimile of a physical grocery store in digital space. As audiences “shop the aisles,” their motions effectively map madness throughout the website—and the physical location it cites.⁸ If spatial metaphors position madness as “out there,” our production demonstrates that madness is, in fact, “right here,” present in the most quotidian of spaces and, therefore, available for mad critique.

Mad Maps not only pushed us to apply access features to theatre-by-mail and digital performance techniques; it also transformed our understanding of madness

237, and Petra Kuppers, "Invited Hauntings in Site-Specific Performance and Poetry: *The Asylum Project*." *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 23, no. 3 (2018): 104-119.

⁷ For more on the relationship between madness and disability, consult Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 1-24. For more on access practices—and their political effects—consult Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2017).

⁸ We are certainly not the first to consider the relationship between performance and mapping. For an overview of these intersections, consult Karen O' Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). For an application of these ideas in digital performance, consult Cara Spooner, “Movement Maps,” *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 7.3 (2011): n.p.

as it is imagined, lived, and (in the context of our production) celebrated through mad performance praxis. Our essay reflects this transformation through a series of short reflections, each authored by a different *Mad Maps* collaborator. Director Alexis Riley first contextualizes the production, providing an overview of key ideas informing the larger project excerpted from introductory materials sent to the ensemble at the outset of the project. Contributing artist Angenette Spalink then guides readers through the creation of her piece, taking particular care to convey the embodied and affective sensations that underpin her process of mad making. Dramaturg Molly Roy addresses the process of juxtaposing the *Mad Maps* performances alongside one another, addressing accessibility within the digital performance space as a method for conveying mad epistemologies. Throughout, we deploy a polyvocal and, at times, performative writing style, one intended to convey disparate aspects of mad thinking typically unavailable in conventional academic prose.⁹ In doing so, we ask readers to approach changes in voice, alterations in formatting, and gaps in meaning as purposeful invitations to take up a different and, perhaps, mad mode of engagement. We also pair our written prose with hyperlinks to specific portions of the project, creating space for readers to chart their own path through the essay and its digital performance counterpart. Moving through acts of contextualization, creation, and curation, these fragmentary sections enact a range of ideas, affects, and experiences characteristic of both our process and our product—a performance of mad praxis.



⁹ Here, again, we are indebted to LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, who identify polyvocality as a central feature of mad studies research, as well as Kuppens, Heit, Sizemore-Barber, Preston, Hickey, and Wille, who explicitly connect that polyvocality to the collaborative nature of performance creation.

Mad Contexts

Alexis Riley, Director

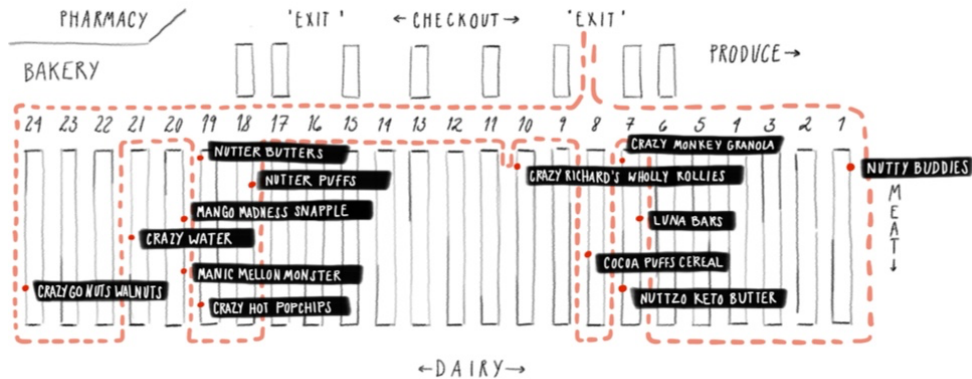


Image 1. A hand-drawn image generated for the *Mad Maps* digital performance website. The picture shows a birds-eye view of the grocery store from which products for the performance were retrieved. Long thin rectangles placed underneath ascending numbers represent the aisles, while black labels with white text mark the location of thirteen products: Crazy Go Nuts Walnuts, Crazy Water, Nutter Butters, Nutter Puffs, Mango Madness Snapple, Manic Mellon Monster, Crazy Hot Popchips, Crazy Richard's Wholly Rollies, Luna Bars, Cocoa Puffs Cereal, Nuttzo Keto Butter, and Nutty Buddies. A dashed red line weaves through the image, creating a map of director Alexis Riley's movements as they collected items from the store.

Rather than asking *what* is madness, might we instead ask:
where is madness?

"The grocery store" may seem a strange response to this question, however, commercial spaces routinely commodify identity, using product packaging to condense abstract concepts into material shorthand. Consider the pervasive use of mad language in product packaging: Insane Grains oatmeal, Nuttzo peanut butter, Manic Monster energy drinks; the list goes on. For mad people, these quotidian sites can be highly-charged, evoking feelings of isolation, empowerment, shame, kinship, and (dis)identification, among others. At the same time, while psychiatric diagnoses are often framed as immaterial ideas, when

presented in products like Manic Mellon Snapple Tea, we—the shoppers—are suddenly able to touch a concept and ask: What about the tea is *manic*? Or conversely: What about the person experiencing mania is. . . *tea*? How do these ideas—person, food, psychiatric term—inform each other? Moving through the grocery store, then, is no simple act. Here, we *come into relation* with each object, its presence materializing abstract concepts in physical form. Through these spatial encounters, lines between self and other move in multiple directions:

body	—	object
human	—	non-human
consumer	—	consumed
non-mad	—	mad
me	—	not me*

**(or, in my case, — = +; also me; me and not me)*

Importantly, attending closely to these everyday encounters and the relationships they produce can draw attention to the embodied affective memories (feelings, sensations) each object evokes within us. For example, when you encounter the Manic Mellon Snapple Tea, how does your body respond? Do you move towards it or away from it—from tea, from mania? Does your movement draw your thoughts inward or outward? Where might you end up—what times, places, memories, and/or histories might you inhabit—if you follow the movement of those thoughts? These movements map our personal and collective relationships to madness, relationships that are too often structured by ableist notions of madness as unreason, as excess, as horror.

And yet, as we engage objects within the grocery store, we can also use our artistry to creatively reauthor their discourse, manipulating physical objects to challenge “common sense” understandings of mental disability and distress. “As many scholars of illness have remarked, ‘living through illness’ seems. . . to confound the narrativized, temporalized, imaginary of ‘one’s human life,’ for it can constitute an undesired stopping point,” disability studies scholar Mel Chen writes. “But for those with the privileges of food, care, and physical support, this pain can also become a meditation (if forced) on the conditions that underlie both

illness and wellness.”¹⁰ Chen’s comments feel particularly prescient within the time of COVID-19, when so many have been met with an undesired stopping point, while others—those marked as essential, those with less privilege or resources—are unable to stop, disallowed. Further, Chen’s observations draw our attention to the politicized nature of quotidian spaces like grocery stores, particularly in the context of a pandemic.

At the same time, Chen offers an excellent method for enacting those politics: mindfully, carefully, as an act of tender contestation. Located in the microcosm of the grocery store, we can (re)learn to move through feeling, greeting each object as a meditative partner and asking, gently, what concepts, memories, and sensations emerge. Taken together, these acts create *mad maps*: sensate, choreographic scores tracing a genealogy that migrates, madly, across time and space, memory and history, body and object, clinic, and commons.¹¹ Enacted in the bodily pause in response to a bottle of tea, the rotation of its glass form on the shelf, the shift of its weight from hand to cart, such moments of tactile consideration point towards the possibility of madness as epistemology, as perceptual mode.

This is a small revolution. For mad people, moving and feeling are routinely pathologized, narrated as irrational, inappropriate, or inscrutable. Creating mad maps affirms the insight of our mad bodyminds, reframing them not as sources of potential disorder, but rather as sources of profound wisdom. When staged through digital performance, these interventions become potent vehicles for the dissemination of mad praxis, defamiliarizing—that is to say, maddening—everyday space while inviting audiences to think, move, and feel otherwise.

¹⁰ Mel Y Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 20.

¹¹ A number of organizations affiliated with mad and psychiatric survivor communities offer workshops on generating *mad maps*: documents that chart strategies for navigating crisis. While distinct from our practice of mad mapping, these community interventions—and the forms of embodied knowledge they record—shape our thinking for the relationship between madness and mapping. For more on mad maps, consult, The Icarus Project, “Madness and Oppression: Paths to Personal Transformation and Collective Liberation, A Mad Maps Guide by The Icarus Project,” Accessed May 1, 2023. <https://fireweedcollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/MadnessAndOppressionGuide.pdf>

Mad Creation

Angenette Spalink, Contributor



Z3A, R6C, T6UOYN

Angie Spalink

Image 2. A screenshot from the *Mad Maps* digital performance website, featuring three photographs. In the first, titled “Z3A,” a blue wooden elephant sits atop a box of diapers and stacked books, accompanied by two wooden letters, a red “A” and purple “Z.” A small peanut butter ball rests on the elephant’s back. In the second image, titled “R6C” the same elephant appears in a small garden, its trunk touching a bed of woodchips. Two wooden letters, a purple “R” and orange “C,” along with a yellow “6,” peek out of the dirt. A peanut butter ball rests in the shade of a plant, located behind the elephant. The final image, “T6UOYN,” depicts the elephant in a bathroom sink, water pouring onto their trunk. Wooden letters, an orange “T,” teal “U,” blue “Y,” and backwards yellow “N,” are scattered along the sink, along with a purple “0” and blue “6.” A peanut butter ball sits by the faucet, surrounded by the “T” and “6.” The titles of each image appear in succession below, followed by the artist’s name: Angenette Spalink.

Product: [Crazy Richard’s Wholly Rollies](#)

UPC: 074822000142

CRAZY. 1. *adverb, extremely.* example: “I’ve been crazy busy.” 2. *noun, a mentally deranged person.* example: “keep that crazy away from me.” source: *Oxford Languages.*

I sit on the floor of a room thrown into chaos. It was supposed to be a nursery. The Covid-19 pandemic, however, has remapped the space into a makeshift office. Here, I teach and attend meetings on Zoom while the sounds of a crying infant in an adjacent room provide an unceasing soundtrack. The room has also become a storage facility as boxes of diapers, half sorted piles of clothes, books, and toys, are strewn about. I have carefully curated the space so that the infant detritus does not infiltrate the surveilling gaze of Zoom to perform some semblance of work/life separation.

This is the *mise en scène* in which I open the package I received in the mail containing my *Mad Maps* object. The package contains a bright orange pouch of Crazy Richard's Wholly Rollies, "the original frozen protein ball." Scrutinizing the packaging, I read more about these snack-size balls of protein:

Wholesome, Real Ingredients

Peanut butter, gluten free oats, dates, golden raisins, flax, organic cinnamon

Non GMO

No Palm Oil

Plant based

4g protein

80 calories

0mg sodium

6g fat

0g added sugar

Alexis crafted a series of "[cartographic prompts](#)," that accompany the Crazy Richard's Wholly Rollies. These questions encourage thoughtful theoretical and embodied engagement with the object:

Examine the packaging. Is it square or oblong? In a box, bag, or bottle? Cardboard or plastic? Smooth or rough in texture? What colors are used? What fonts or images appear?

Identify the mad-associated term in your product. What does this term mean to you? What kind of associations does it evoke? When did you first learn this term?

I notice the logo, a large elephant and a small elephant that appear to be caretaker and child. Their trunks connect to form a heart. This reminds me of a toy I had as a child. Crazy Richard’s website informs me, “We want to promote healthy families who in turn can change the world. We are just crazy enough to believe that even a small effort can create a big impact.” I then analyze the packaging, verbiage, images, company rhetoric, and mad terminology of the Wholly Rollies. The numbers and letters on the package begin to swirl around my mind. Dancing and darting, they disconnect from their original context.

4g	C	0g	W			
80	P	R		0mg		
		L	Y		6g	S
	I	M		0g		E
		O	P		A	5
						10

*How does your food or drink move? Are there other ways to move it?
How does it make you feel?*

Dance with your product.

I move with the package, extracting individual wholly rollies to experience their tactility and texture. I partner the protein balls with mundane objects in the room. I transport them into different spaces, observing how varied settings alter their structure, movement, and shape.

A series of dioramas emerge. They are jumbled compositions combining deconstructed elements of Crazy Richard’s Wholly Rollies with the current state of my life as a new parent. The dioramas combine numbers, letters, and wholly rollies, with everyday objects like diapers, puzzle pieces, containers, soap, water, dirt, rocks, and lettuce. They are connected thematically through a small blue

plastic toy elephant (reminiscent of my childhood toy) who is the central character of each scenario. I document the dioramas through photographs.

Where is madness?

Just as encountering mad items in the grocery store allows the buyer to acknowledge the memories, sensations, and emotions that emerge, so too did the dioramas evoke feelings and affects for me. The plastic toy elephant traversed the constructed mad spaces (composed of Wholly Rollies and prosaic objects) of each diorama. These material mélanges exhibited entanglements of domestic and professional, work and life, parenthood and a pandemic. Constructing them enabled me to creatively contend with the disconnect between my expectations and current reality, contemplating how the pandemic altered my experience of parenthood. These assemblages embodied the ways in which work seeps into life. Life seeps into work spatially, intellectually, and emotionally. Connecting objects, spaces, feelings, affects, and emotions, these dioramas created a mad map of my situated postpartum experience as a pandemic parent.

The mad praxis of *The Mad Maps Project* allowed meaning to emerge through theoretical and embodied engagement with my mad object (Crazy Richard's Wholly Rollies) and my mad pandemic experience, demonstrating that spaces of madness can be sources of creativity and knowledge. The process also reminded me that creating art can be fun and joyful, even in uncertain circumstances. Mad praxis can remap mundane spaces into sites of play and imagination.



Mad Curation

Molly Roy, Dramaturg

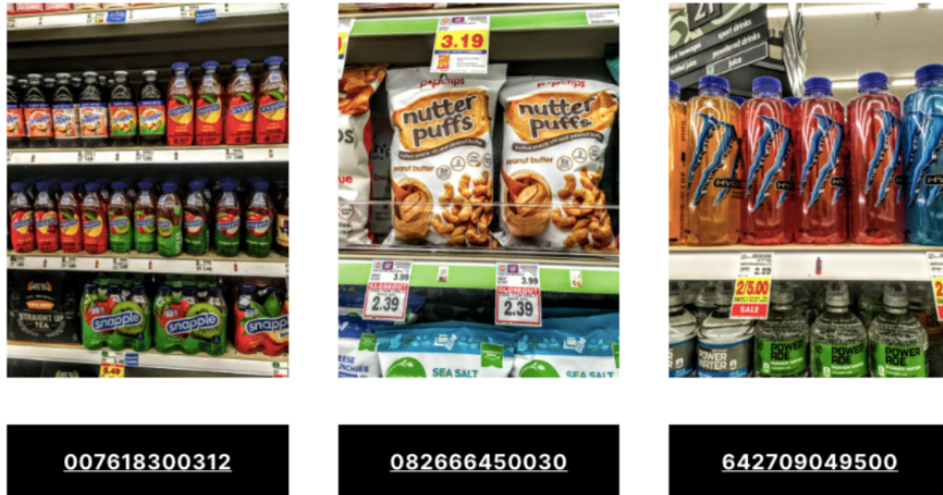


Image 3. A screenshot from the *Mad Maps* digital performance website depicting three photos arranged in a row. Each photo shows a grocery product sitting on a grocery store shelf. The first shows Manic Melon Snapple Tea bottles; the second, bags of Nutter Puffs, priced at \$2.39; the third, rows of Manic Monster Energy Drinks, 2 for \$5.00; Under each photo, a black label with white text lists the corresponding product's UPC number, which links to the selected product's performance page. Together, these images constitute one of several digital "shelves" hosted on the *Mad Maps* website.

This project moves across multiple spaces and materialities, a geography of vernacular registers, situated objects, and embodied knowledges. Each of the thirteen contributions maps a creative process, a mad exploration, an intervention in discursive-material space. From bodies moving through mundane brick and mortar; objects moving through postal codes; small gestures moving a screened interface; the work gathers layered choreographies and forms of exchange, circulating across spatial and temporal distance, magnified by the pandemic. Through this process of gathering, we have sought to center ideas around access, thinking through access as a concept, a practice, and a dramaturgical structure.

Creating a collective performance space, website design becomes our scenography, and together we transpose the affective architecture of the grocery

store onto a digital stage. Brightly colored images of products from the actual store where they were purchased are arranged in rows on virtual shelves; each item identified with a numeric product code. Canned music auto-plays in the background as the website launches, marking entrance into the space. The site navigation menu indexes familiar routines—shop the aisles and proceed to checkout, where you will receive an offer to become a preferred shopper rewards member.

Drawing on disability cultural practices, the door of our grocery store—as in the welcome page of the website—opens with an access statement:

Please feel free to use this website in whatever way is most accessible for you. You may want to focus only on this performance or have the television on in the background. You may choose to eat or drink, care for yourself or others, leave and come back, sit, or move around, and so on. However, you decide to engage, you are most welcome.¹²

Once the audience-as-shopper has entered the aisles, there is no prescribed path or necessary trajectory. Everyone may browse at will. Select a product and perhaps find a dance, a song, or an installation, presented along with dictionary entries and excerpts from marketing materials, traces of other archives and common repositories. Be a repeat customer, consume every detail, or remove an item from the shopping list altogether, return it to the shelf unopened. Content notes advise when ingredients may not be palatable.

Each contribution, each product offering, has multiple points of access and engagement, including captions, video transcripts, and textual or audio descriptions. [Nutter Puffs](#), for example, features a video with a descriptive transcript along with an accompanying poem. [Manic Mellon Monster Energy Drink](#) is served with two performance versions, one with captions enabled and one with audio description. Each of the photographs in [Crazy Richard's Wholly Rollys](#) is paired with a rich image description.

These access features reflect artistic choices, mediums, and modes of conveyance, emerging as poetic renderings and multimodal affects. They attest to access as generative possibility, as an opening for breadth, depth, or dimension. Understood in this way, access work is not an add-on or an afterthought but a

¹² The access statement is offered as an invitation to pause and reflect on the numerous (often ableist) norms that structure performance events—and to begin to imagine those norms otherwise. Our access statement is informed by and indebted to numerous mad and disability activists and scholars, including TL Lewis, Eli Clare, Alison Kafer, Margaret Price, Sarah Orem, and Susan Burch.

creative process in itself, woven through each individual contribution and the project as a whole.

Creative access work cultivates space for artists as well as the audiences they engage. *Mad Maps* charts a method of performance-making that meets participants where they are, quite literally in one sense, but also in terms of centering their own access needs within the project, in ways that are not always available in traditional theatre contexts. Artists determined their own where, when, and how, loosened from expectations of linearity or legibility, encouraged to find their own scope of possibility within the project. While these methods became particularly relevant during the pandemic, they offer considerations for more accessible and politically engaged performance spaces moving forward.

Enacted in the context of a piece on madness, these access features ultimately serve as a bridge to mad epistemologies—epistemologies that often escape conventional dramaturgy.¹³ When coupled with *Mad Maps*' digital format, attention to multiple forms of access serves to unsettle standard frames of reception; audiences seeking to “diagnose” a given piece or “make sense” of the project are redirected towards the project's unexpected juxtapositions and multisensory modes of inquiry. As access features and mad forms of knowledge production converge, performance disorients quotidian space, inviting artists and audiences alike to consider the critical insights afforded by thinking, moving, and mapping madly.

Madness on the Move

If spatial metaphors routinely cast madness—and by extension, mad people—out of shared time and space, our investigation of the grocery store demonstrates that these metaphors are not trivial; rather they permeate and structure our everyday spaces. Moreover, while language around madness—and the power it exerts on

¹³ In contemplating mad dramaturgies, we are buoyed by the work of several mad artists and scholars who use poetry and performative writing to subvert normative critique by invoking—in both content and form—the spatial and somatic contours of mad experience. For more, consult Stephanie Heit, *Psych Murders* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2022); Luke James Leo Kernan, “Psychotic Bodies/Embodiment of Suicidal Bipolar Poets: Navigating Through the Sensorium of Immersive Worlds and Psychoscapes,” *Liminalities* 16.1 (2020): 1-31; and Phil Smith, *Writbing Writing: Moving Towards a Mad Poetics* (Fort Worth: Autonomous Press, 2018).

mad lives—is often abstract, mad performance praxis offers those who experience mental disability and distress embodied, material, and affective strategies to engage this power. In addition to “speaking back,” these acts derange and defamiliarize quotidian sites, producing a maddened sense of space. Within the context of our production, we as artists experience this sensibility when darting through the grocery store searching for mad-labeled products, when arranging wooden figurines and magnetic letters in disordered fashion on a bathroom sink, when curating image descriptions that gesture towards nonlinear and multisensory modes.

Moreover, the maddened sense of place we both experienced and created has extended long beyond the frame of our performance event. In the years that have passed since we completed *Mad Maps*, we have been unable to shake the critical sensitivity around mad language we developed throughout the course of creating the production, our trips to stores, restaurants, and events frequently interrupted by the unexpected yet seemingly ubiquitous presence of terms like “insane,” “crazy,” and “psycho.” Further, as we continue to document these more recent mad sightings on the *Mad Maps* Instagram page (@MadMapsProject), we cannot help but wonder if audience members experienced a similar shift in attention, and while we are not able to say for sure, a slow but present trickle of product images sent to our inbox suggests this may be the case. These conversations represent what we view as one outcome of mad praxis: an increased capacity to perceive madness as a meaningful social identity, to embrace mad people as creators of meaning, and to activate performance as a method for activating and conveying that meaning in ways that accord with mad experience.

As we encourage other artists to take madness seriously as an epistemological location, our attention turns to future considerations. If, as we believe, mad peoples’ artistic insights stem, in part, from their experiences as marginalized people navigating anti-mad spaces, who can lay claim to mad performance praxis? How do we, as artists in community with one another, create specific support structures for artists who experience mental disability and distress—while simultaneously acknowledging the complexity and fluidity of such disability and distress, diagnosed or undiagnosed? To what extent might performance praxis grounded in the material perspectives and epistemic interventions of mad people counteract historical practices of romanticization and mad mimicry, instead cultivating increased sensitivity and cultural competency, a desire to embrace madness as an epistemological orientation? For us, these remain open questions, and while we sense that the nuances of mad performance praxis are too complex

to offer blanket assertions outside the context of a particular production, we also believe that asking these questions can serve as a valuable starting point to respectful and critical engagement.

While COVID-19 lockdowns have lifted and the official run of *Mad Maps* has come to an end, our cartographic practices continue. We welcome you to access our [website](#), materials from our [Accessible Digital Performance workshop](#), and [creative prompts](#) for mad-mapmaking. Or you can contribute to our [ongoing archive](#) and share found references to mad language that you encounter in your daily itineraries and interactions. Possibilities abound: Sporting events welcome us to March Madness tournaments, songs decry “manic Mondays,” emails enter our inbox: “I hope this email finds you well.” “I hope you are staying sane.” And so, we journey—madly—together, through grocery store aisles, across continental shipping routes, through digital spaces and beyond, hoping to gather fellow travelers along the way. . .

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