"Ta daaaa": Presenting Pig Iron Theatre Company

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The prior claims of the tiger notwithstanding, 2010 may prove to be the year of the pig. In February, a photograph of the work of Pig Iron Theatre Company graced the cover of *American Theatre* magazine; the image was accompanied by a feature article conferring mainstream recognition on Pig Iron's experimental work, surveying the Philadelphia-based collective's most recent piece (2009's *Welcome to Yuba City*) and lauding its overall achievements: "24 original productions and tour[s] to 11 countries since its founders—co-artistic directors Gabriel Quinn Bauriedel, Dito van Reigersberg, and Dan Rothenberg—met at Swarthmore College 20 years ago" (Apple 2010). Bauriedel, Reigersberg, and Rothenburg bonded at Swarthmore in the early 1990s while studying with Professor Allen Kuharski in a class on the history of avantgarde theatre ensembles, including the work of Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre and Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre. Eager to enact their own versions of the theories and historical practices that they were studying, the three friends, in concert with fellow Swarthmore students, produced a number of original works, the culminating and most successfully achieved of which was a senior project, *Cyrano for Two Quartets*. A four-actor adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* whose performers were accompanied by a string quartet, the piece posed the stylistic and conceptual questions: How do you integrate the string quartet rather than have it play to the side? How, that is, can you make a piece in which the line between actor and musician is blurred,

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where each becomes the other? Thinking carefully about space, the students ushered audiences to seven different locations, all within one large room, for seven respective parts of the action: "different frames for different scenes" (Bauriedel 2010).

Emboldened by the success of the project—which audience members assured the students was as accomplished as similarly styled professional work (Reigersberg 2010) and which, in Bauriedel's estimation, was the "real seed" of Pig Iron (2010)—the graduating collaborators emerged from the experience with two related goals: to make another original piece, with seven performers, for the 1995 Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Reigersberg 2010); and to pursue a form of "hybrid performance" that would combine elements like dance and theatre, music-making and acting, and that would result from "laboratory" experimentation. The creators would produce a work guided "not [by] what [they] know how to do" already, but by "a question [they] don't know how to answer" (Bauriedel 2010). The result of this first post-graduate effort (and the first piece to be produced under the name Pig Iron), *The Odyssey*, was a "dance-theatre adaptation of Homer's classic" (Pig Iron Theatre Company 2010c) that pursued "story-telling through movement sequences" and that received a five-star review from *The Scotsman*, poising the group for the eager reception of future pieces (Reigersberg 2010). Perhaps more important, the first exposures to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, where the group returned the following year, were a crucial step in Pig Iron's education—or, in Reigersberg's words, "a boot camp of self-producing that we learned a lot from"—as the collaborators developed ways to market their performances successfully, to "perform their damnedest for [...] small audiences," and to devise new rehearsal strategies by discussing the other Fringe work that they were seeing together as a company (2010). Such new strategies also came from Lecoq training, which Rothenburg and Bauriedel were receiving at L'École Jacques Lecoq in Paris (Bauriedel 2010), and from Reigersberg's dance training at both the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance in New York (Reigersberg 2010).

Founding members' pursuits of graduate training limited Pig Iron's earliest efforts to summers, during which the group was aided, financially and materially, by residencies at Swarthmore College that provided housing, rehearsal and performance spaces, and—most important—an enthusiastic and supportive "audience to test things out on" (Bauriedel 2010). In 1996, the group established its 501(c)(3) status as a non-profit organization, received a grant from the Pennsylvania State Council on the Arts, and developed a piece for Philadelphia's first Fringe Festival (now the Live Arts Festival). Pig Iron chose Philadelphia as a home base not only because of the proximity to Swarthmore and its resources, but also because of solid foundation support for the arts in the city and its day-to-day affordability; the group's members felt that it was a location where they could "concentrate on building an ensemble" without worrying about their financial solvency. They recognized, too, that "no other company in town" was producing the kind of work that they wanted to make and that they could, consequentially, have a "bigger impact" (than in, for instance, New York) on an "audience [that] was hungry to be a part" of the Pig Iron experience (Bauriedel 2010). That experience, funded initially by donations from family and friends, program advertisements, and workshop teaching, was later bolstered by a "pivotal" Pugh Foundation fellowship and is now aided by considerable foundation support; 250 individual donors; income from teaching, touring fees, and ticket sales; and

Figure 1. (facing page) Sascha (Geoff Sobelle) and Nikolai (Dito van Reigersberg), Chekhov Lizardbrain*, 21 March 2007, Latvian Society of Philadelphia. (Courtesy of Pig Iron Theatre Company)*

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Pig Iron Theatre Company

All productions devised by Pig Iron Theatre Company and directed by Dan Rothenberg, unless otherwise noted. Date and location of premieres.

1995 *The Odyssey* by Homer. Frear Theatre, Swarthmore College, PA.
1996 *Dig or Fly*. Frear Theatre, Swarthmore College, PA.
1997 *Poet in New York* by Dan Rothenberg and Dito van Reigersberg. Theatre for the New City, New York City.
1997 *Cafeteria*. Pearson-Hall Theatre, Swarthmore, PA.
1998 *The Tragedy of Joan of Arc*. Trinity Center, Philadelphia.
1998 *Gentlemen Volunteers*. St. Mary's Church, Philadelphia.
1998 *Trip to the Moon*. Frear Theatre, Swarthmore College, PA.
1998 *The Impossible Play*. Frear Theatre, Swarthmore College, PA.
1999 *Newborn Things*. Directed by Dan Rothenberg, David Gammons, and Jeanette Hemstad. Frear Theatre, Swarthmore College, PA.
1999 *The Snow Queen*. Arden Theatre, Philadelphia.
2000 *Mission to Mercury*. Christ Church Annex, Philadelphia.
2001 *Anodyne* by Deborah Stein. Smoke, Philadelphia.
2001 *Shut Eye*. Directed by Dan Rothenberg and Joseph Chaikin. Mandell Theater, Drexel University, Philadelphia.
2002 *Flop*. Christ Church Annex, Philadelphia.
2002 *She Who Makes the Moon the Moon*. BeauMonde, Philadelphia.
2003 *James Joyce Is Dead and So Is Paris: The Lucia Joyce Cabaret* by Deborah Stein, music by James Sugg. Christ Church Annex, Philadelphia.
2004 *Hell Meets Henry Halfway* by Adriano Shaplin. Plays and Players Theater, Philadelphia.
2005 *Pay Up!* by Robert Quillen Camp. The National, Philadelphia.
2006 *Love Unpunished.* Choreographed by David Brick. Cinema at Penn, Philadelphia.
2007 *Chekhov Lizardbrain* by Robert Quillen Camp and Pig Iron Theatre Company. Latvian Society of Philadelphia.
2007 *Isabella*. Adapted from William Shakespeare. Ice Box Projects Loft, Philadelphia.
2007 *365 Days/365 Plays* by Suzan-Lori Parks, music and lyrics by Cynthia Hopkins. Brick Theater, Brooklyn, NY.
2008 *Come to My Awesome Fiesta, It's Going to Be Awesome, Okay?* Directed by Alex Torra. Church of St. John the Evangelist, Philadelphia.
2008 *Sweet By-and-By*. Performed and conceived by Daniel Rudholm. Arts Bank, Philadelphia.
2009 *Welcome to Yuba City* by Deborah Stein, directed by Gabriel Quinn Bauriedel, songs by Michael Friedman. The Hub, Philadelphia.
2010 *Cankerblossom: A Dark Fairytale*. Christ Church Neighborhood House, Philadelphia.

a 15-person board of directors, whose members contribute to projects' financing. During this evolution, Bauriedel, Reisenburg, and Rothenberg became the company's official artistic directors and established guidelines for other collaborators' participation as "company members," who hold meetings at which emergent projects are discussed. The actual personnel on these projects expands and contracts in a way largely dependent on members' and others' availability, and the group's structure, both financially and artistically, makes it more like a dance company than a traditional non-profit theatre: Pig Iron relies heavily on "contributed revenue" from donors to support its creative process, which involves long rehearsal periods—sometimes as long as a year—in the development of new pieces (Bauriedel 2010). The goals of this creative process are articulated in a mission statement available to readers of the company's website:

> The mission of Pig Iron Theatre Company is to create original performance works which test and break the boundaries of dance, drama, clown, puppetry, music, and text; to experiment with form while staying accessible; to develop a physical, theatrical performance technique that draws from many performance traditions; to re-imagine "classics" with both irreverence and a desire to make them relevant; [...] to reach out to new audiences by redefining theatre as an interdisciplinary art form; to form and maintain an international ensemble of theatre artists that are flexible and forward-thinking; and to pose the difficult questions of our difficult times. (Pig Iron Theatre Company 2010a)

To pose a difficult question in turn, How may we synthesize the different elements of this mission statement, and then use that synthesis as the basis for a further investigation of Pig Iron's work and for the contextual situation of that work?

The two conditions, broadly construed, that are arguably common to each objective in Pig Iron's mission statement are adaptation and movement. Adaptation is perhaps best understood as a capacious mode constituted by myriad, interpenetrating aspects of artistic production and reception; as Linda Hutcheon suggests in a multipronged redefinition of adaptation, the term may and ought to connote three related processes: "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works," "a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging," and "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (2006:8). All three of these elements are at play in the development of—and in audience responses to—Pig Iron's typifying work, which, like Hutcheon's definition, stretches *adaptation* to encompass not only the reimagining of broadly familiar texts, but also the renegotiation of broadly experienced cultural codes, social rituals, and performance styles. Indeed, the group mines more or less expected approaches to adaptation, as in 1998's *The Tragedy of Joan of Arc*, a "re-telling of one woman's lonely fight to save France" in which "Greek chorus meets red-nosed clown," and in 2007's *Isabella*, a "radical re-cutting" of *Measure for Measure*, "set in a [...] morgue and re-imagined as a startling work of human puppetry"; but its members also pursue a rich and more curious trace of adaptation in such projects as 2000's *Mission to Mercury*, a "cabaret-ballet inspired by the rock band Queen," and *Come to My Awesome Fiesta, It's Going to Be Awesome, Okay?* from 2008, a re-creation of a quinceañera that interrogates "the international culture of 'cuteness'" (Pig Iron Theatre Company 2010c). As for movement, we encounter it conceptually in Pig Iron's restless trajectory from one source of inspiration to another, and also foregrounded more literally—and more crucially—in the group's physical approach to theatrical invention. The legacy of Lecoq training is palpable in the group's emphases on improvisation, which centrally animates rehearsals; and on clowning, mime, and related forms of play, which suffuse finished pieces (Bauriedel 2010; Reigersberg 2010). Even more fundamentally, the group's very identity as a forum for making theatre collectively has a strong precedent in the twin imperatives of openness (*disponsibilité*) and collaboration (*complicité*) that Simon Murray identifies as central to Lecoq's pedagogy (2003:70).

Figure 2. Emmanuelle Delpech-Ramey in Joan of Arc*, Trinity Center for Urban Life, Philadelphia, 1999. (Courtesy of Pig Iron Theatre Company)*

Indebtedness to Lecoq may likewise be operative in another strong lineament of Pig Iron's work, though a lineament less immediately legible in the group's mission statement—namely, the group's interest in exploring alternative modes of consciousness. As co-artistic director Dan Rothenberg has observed more than once, including in an interview with the *New York Times*, "This thing [...], the theory of minds, is how we imagine other people's intentions. It's something that neuroscientists are trying to figure out, how we do this thing that seems so simple but is the source of so much misery. It's one of my own obsessions" (in Piepenburg 2010). As a collectively enjoined obsession that Rothenberg shares with the other members of Pig Iron, "imagin[ing] other people's intentions" may have origins in and may be usefully interpreted as an outgrowth of Lecoq training, which figures neutrality as a necessary (pre)condition for performance. Sears A. Eldredge and Hollis W. Huston explain the philosophy animating Lecoq's pedagogical routes to neutrality, such as work with what he calls the neutral mask:

> To approach neutral action, one must lose oneself, denying one's own attitudes or intentions. At the moment of neutral action, one does not know what one will do next, because anticipation is a mark of personality; one cannot describe how one feels because introspection intrudes on simplicity; one reacts in a sensory way, because when the mind stops defining experience, the senses still function. (1978:21)

Figure 3. Charles Conwell and Randy Rand in Isabella*, September 2007, Crane Arts Building, Philadelphia Live Arts Festival. (Courtesy of Pig Iron Theatre Company)*

Worth noting are the dual emphases here on the evacuation of personality and on the privileging of sensory experience. Though Pig Iron has moved away from specific exercises like work with the neutral mask, the group's members remain invested in "principles" learned at Lecoq, which include an "openness" to the world and a focus on "realizing in *doing* what they care about together" (Bauriedel 2010). The legacy of Lecoq techniques in such governing principles may point us toward the ways in which "imagining other people's intentions" is rooted, for Pig Iron, in the body and its movements, not in a model of interiority and identification. To make a related gesture, I have translated "imagining other people's intentions" into "exploring alternative modes of consciousness"; the latter is a phrase with which I mean at once to invoke the troubled (and still all-too-familiar) formulation *abnormal states of mind* and to repudiate that formulation's associations with regimes of judgment and models of depth psychology. If Pig Iron is invested in presenting so-called aberrant or marginal subjectivities—and, indeed, I would argue that this investment figures almost as prominently in the group's work as do cultivations of movement and adaptation—then the presentations of those subjectivities are guided by a receptiveness to the other (the experience of difference, not the classification of disease or evil) and an awareness of the other's agency (a presumption of her active means of apprehending the world, not of the passive ends of her psychic impingement by it). Perhaps more important, Pig Iron's defining explorations of alternative modes of consciousness are, in fact, inseparable from its equally defining deployments of adaptation and movement: how else, the group's pieces ask, to explore

such modes of consciousness but to adapt to and from them, to move into and through them? Intertextuality and physicality provide the tools with which Pig Iron performs such phenomena as schizophrenia and autism—and the respective performances thereof are at the center of the group's most critically acclaimed and professionally honored works: *James Joyce Is Dead and So Is Paris: The Lucia Joyce Cabaret*, recognized with 2003 Barrymore Awards for best supporting actress (Emmanuelle Delpech-Ramey) and best sound design; and *Chekhov Lizardbrain*, which was named one of the top 10 theatre events of 2008 by the *New York Times* and for which performer James Sugg won a 2008 Obie Award. I highlight these two works not only because such a focus allows me to offer a thick description of the strategies that assessors of Pig Iron have deemed most successful, but also, and more signally, because I find in the works' overlapping preoccupations the enactment of the group's most unique and exciting contribution to the practice (and theory) of contemporary performance: the condensation—indeed, the mutual constitution—of innovative citation, athletic embodiment, and subaltern encounter.

"My Tale of Woe's Already Written"

During the 2003 premiere production of *James Joyce Is Dead and So Is Paris: The Lucia Joyce Cabaret* (hereafter, *Lucia Joyce*) at Christ Annex Church in Philadelphia, performances began with a serious joke: audiences were "given a program, handmade by 'Lucia Joyce,' for a performance written and directed by Lucia Joyce, with music by Lucia Joyce, [with] set and costumes by Lucia Joyce, [and] starring Lucia Joyce as herself" (Osenlund 2003). This narcissistic conceit extends into the piece itself, a cabaret set in a mental hospital in Northampton, England (a proxy for the institution where the real Lucia Joyce, daughter of James, spent the last 30 years of her life), and emceed by Lucia (Cassandra Friend), who has enlisted the fellow residents of Northampton to help her present her life through a vaudevillian combination of narration, song, pantomime, standup, and magic act—and who underlines the sustained collision of sobriety and humor through the repeated, seriously intoned aside to the audience, "I'm joking" (Stein et al. 2005). It is through her jarringly flat addresses to the audience, with this aside being the most deadpan, that Lucia conveys (often elliptically and circuitously) the defining episodes of her life: her early neglect by her parents, who moved repeatedly and transnationally during her formative years; her romantic rejection by Samuel Beckett, who served briefly as her father's secretary; acts of chair-throwing and fire-starting, which were interpreted by her family as signs of steadily mounting illness and which resulted in a series of institutionalizations during which she was declared (among other diagnoses) schizophrenic; and a defining act of defiance, also described by a number of critics, that becomes the subject of a song and that sets the stage, as it were, for the circumstances in which we encounter her:

Figure 4. Lucia Joyce, later revealed to be Gloria (Cassandra Friend), James Joyce Is Dead and So Is Paris: The Lucia Joyce Cabaret*, 21 April 2005, Christ Church Neighborhood House, Philadelphia. (© Jacques-Jean Tiziou/www.jjtiziou.net)*

> One night in 1933, she was at home when the news came that a United States District Court had declared *Ulysses* not obscene (which meant that it could be published in the States). The Joyces' phone rang and rang with congratulatory calls. Lucia cut the phone wires—"*I'm* the artist," she said—and when they were repaired she cut them again. As her behavior grew worse, her hospitalizations became longer. [...Eventually] the Joyces

> put her in an asylum in Ivry, outside Paris. She was 28, and she never lived on the outside again. She changed hospitals a few times, but her condition remained the same. She was quiet for the most part, though periodically she would go into a tearing rage—breaking windows, attacking people—and then she would be put in a straitjacket until she calmed down. This went on for 47 years, until her death, in 1982, at the age of 75. (Acocella 2003)

Joan Acocella writes thus in a review of Carol Loeb Shloss's biography, *Lucia Joyce: To Dance in the Wake* (2003). In a coincidence that Bauriedel describes as "serendipitous," Shloss, a fellow Swarthmore alumna, was writing the book at the same time that Pig Iron was developing *Lucia Joyce*, and, as an unofficial dramaturg, she shared as-yet unpublished research with the group, including the above story (2010). Through its structure as a cabaret orchestrated by a still 20-something Lucia, *Lucia Joyce* creates a space in which the sentiment underlining the brief, vivid episode of wire-cutting—"*I'm* the artist"—animates, too, the decades-long, institutional aftermath of the episode: for the duration of the cabaret, she is, far from "quiet for the most part," poised to offer a loud, alt-rock portrait of herself as an artist with singular gifts. As she says in "Destiny," a rumba song early in the performance, "I'm your genius matador" (Stein et al. 2005:4).

But Lucia's singular gifts do not make her story a likewise singular "tale of woe"; and in the very same song she tells us, "I'm Lucia di Lammermoor," a name that she repeats several times to underscore their resemblance. *Lucia Joyce* is a frenetic recreation of 1920s Paris cabaret, made contemporary through a song cycle inspired stylistically by the rock musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Bauriedel 2010); by collections of songs from outsider musicians using unusual instruments, like Irwin Chusid's *Songs in the Key of Z* (2000) (Reigersberg 2010); and, as the original program noted, by such indie bands as Magnetic Fields, Neutral Milk Hotel, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, and Flaming Lips (Pig Iron Theatre Company 2003); but of equal importance, the

Figure 5. Spencer (Gabriel Quinn Bauriedel) and Stella (Amy Pickard), James Joyce Is Dead and So Is Paris: The Lucia Joyce Cabaret*, 21 April 2005, Christ Church Neighborhood House, Philadelphia. (© Jacques-Jean Tiziou/www.jjtiziou.net)*

piece is also an oblique adaptation of Gaetano Donizetti's bel canto opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). At least one critic, defeated by the piece's explicit invocations of Donizetti, declares the adaptive relation "obscure" (Robb 2003), but a closer consideration than his review offers discloses generative links between the two works. Just as Lucia di Lammermoor is abandoned (or so she believes) by her lover Edgardo and subjected to the imperious will of her brother Enrico, so, too, is Lucia Joyce spurned by Samuel Beckett and subjected to the caprices and demands, at best idiosyncratic and at worst abusive, of her father. Indeed, *Lucia Joyce* presents Lucia's hospitalization as the price paid for the domestic peace and continued authorial prosperity of James, much as her forebear Lucia's forced marriage to the politically well-aligned Arturo is meant to restore Enrico's waning fortunes and prospects. Lucia di Lammermoor's words upon entering the unwanted institution of marriage—"Io vado al sacrifizio! [...] La mia condanna ho scritta!" (I'm going to my sacrifice! [...] I've signed my death warrant!; Donizetti and Fisher 2002:23)—could just as well have come from Lucia Joyce upon her own institutional confinement. In fact, they are echoed in her request to one of her fellow performers: "How about a song about sacrifice?" (Stein et al. 2005:26). Moreover, if Lucia di Lammermoor's madness is a result of her unbearable consignment to marriage, then we are similarly invited to see Lucia Joyce's putative illness not as the cause of her institutionalization, but rather as the effect "of drugs, [of] the humiliation of being locked up and supervised, [of] the consequent change in [her] self-image and in other people's image of [...] her" (Acocella 2003); or, as Harvey (Dito van Reigersberg), a fellow resident at Northampton, puts it, "So now the problem is [...] the fact that I've been in here too long and I'm getting what they call institutionalized. Because if you weren't crazy to begin with, this place would make you crazy" (Stein et al. 2005:14).

Pig Iron's intertextual echoes of Donizetti intimate the ways in which Lucia Joyce's schizophrenia, like Lucia di Lammermoor's tragic madness, may invite an audience's pathos, but in further developing Lucia Joyce's pathetic aura, the company makes a great effort to avoid the maudlin overtones that arguably characterize the opera. This refusal of sentimentality owes a great deal of its success to the manner in which the coordinates of so-called mental illness, with their capacity to fix our attention and perhaps inspire our empathy, are conveyed bodily rather than verbally—and not just by Cassandra Friend in the role of Lucia.

As Bauriedel recounts, all the performers' physical choices began with mimicry of the "awkward" subjects featured in Frederick Wiseman's documentary *Titicut Follies* (1967), in which the patients at Bridgewater State Hospital for the criminally insane put on a talent show. The documentary's blurring of the line between reflexive musical performance and the everyday performativity of "illness" inspired Pig Iron to explore a similar paradox in its related effort: performers would embody characters who were simultaneously "in control" (of their instrumentation) and "out of control" (of other bodily responses). Thus Bauriedel played a patient who had "rictus in his hands" but was also a skilled pianist. Such contradictions forced the performers to make "precise physical choices" that became "more precise" when costumes were added (Bauriedel 2010). These costumes, including Lucia's girlish (Freudian?) white slip and Nicholas's (Brad Trojan) beret and slick jacket, (mis)matched with pajama bottoms, could be plausibly worn by either institutionalized subjects or by convention-defying, fashion-minded rock stars; and thus the costumes contributed to the piece's interrogation of the "very thin" line "between rocking out and being [perceived as] actually crazy" (Reigersberg 2010). Perhaps no song captures this identity better than "Virgin under the Bridge," which recalls for me the angry, cultivated amateurism of early Liz Phair and in which patients Madeleine (Emmanuelle Delpech-Ramey), Ruth (Sarah Sanford), and guitarist Stella (Amy Pickard) sing a riotous anthem that makes women's disempowerment and abjection ("You set me / In concrete") the very condition for their defiant, insouciant rebellion ("Where I can wear my concrete crown / I'll join the ground") (Stein et al. 2005:25). This message is conveyed not only through lyrics but also in physical display, as Madeleine bounces, flails her arms, and frames her mouth compulsively with her contorted hand: movements and gestures that connote equal parts rock and institutional madness.

Figure 6. Dr. Landau (Geoff Sobelle), Nicholas (Bradford Trojan), and Lucia Joyce, later revealed to be Gloria (Cassandra Friend), James Joyce Is Dead and So Is Paris: The Lucia Joyce Cabaret, *21 April 2005, Christ Church Neighborhood House, Philadelphia. (© Jacques-Jean Tiziou/www.jjtiziou.net)*

As for Lucia, though she addresses the audience in a number of speeches, her most arresting appeals likewise inhere in carefully calibrated displays of movement—or, by contrast, in the powerful stillness that constitutes movement's suspension. Such stillness defines our introduction to Lucia. At the top of the play, she sits, nearly motionless, on a stool from which she stares unflinchingly at the audience; while her monotonous line delivery would, by itself, convey the affective dullness often associated with schizophrenia, the tension palpable in her stillness and staring connotes rather a repression of drive and feeling that exceeds mere dulling and that will find its intimate counterpoint in eruptive spectacle. Sure enough, Lucia will later rattle a cage door at the back of the theatre with a startling fury—and it is precisely in the gap, or at times the flip, between coiled intensity and its fierce uncoiling that we are, I think, meant to be viscerally shattered and thus rendered vulnerably responsive to Lucia's awkward and volatile humanity.

This opening of the gap, or switching of the flip, between something like catatonia and something like mania is given its most concentrated expression in a scene that is also, tellingly, metatheatrical, as Lucia invites the institution's overseer, Dr. Landau (Geoff Sobelle), to fit her with a straitjacket from which she will attempt an escape in order to entertain the cabaret's audience. At the beginning of the gambit, she appears frozen as she holds out her arms very straight and fixes the audience with a concentrated look; and she remains perfectly still—though never goes limp, as we might expect—as she is straitjacketed and lowered onto her stool (a task that she cannot accomplish herself because of a bad knee, never explained explicitly, that elsewhere requires her to use a cane). During the other patients' ensuing song, a celebration of Maud Gonne ("an Irish rebel, like me [...] and like me, a freedom fighter" [Stein et al. 2005:33]), Lucia moves from taut withholding to intense writhing on the floor immediately below the foot of the stage, as if her desire to escape cannot be accommodated or contained by theatrical limits. Yet at the same time her performance of anguish and excess, replete with wild flipping of hair, is intensely—and calculatedly—theatrical, as Cassandra Friend takes great care to hold Lucia's bad leg as if it were really injured and thus unavailable to the unconstrained expressivity otherwise animating her body. That leg becomes a synecdoche (and no mere rhetorical one) for the performative logic of the scene, in which Lucia never does wriggle out of her straitjacket: we extend our empathy to her precisely because of her failure as a "freedom fighter," by no means thematically limited to but nonetheless richly manifested in the failure of her leg. The fact that the leg's failure is the most theatrically crafted element of the spectacle suggests that it is not some radical break from the artifice of performance, but rather its embodied distillation that makes possible the fraught task (both actor's and audience's) of imagining another's subjectivity. The sinister Dr. Landau underscores this point unwittingly when he sings an ironic "song about empathy" whose cruel chorus, leveled at his patients, repeats the line, "There's nothing in your head" (Stein et al. 2005:36–37). It is true

that there is nothing in his patients' heads that Landau can know directly, but he only comes to the conclusion that his epistemological deficit mirrors their ontological lack because he does not pay sufficient attention to their manifold bodily signs (squawking, prostrating, moaning, shitting, drooling, hitting), which are disdainfully catalogued, rather than generously engaged, in his song. More capaciously embraced, these mediations of the body would provide a fragile ground, but a ground nonetheless, for the operations of empathy.

This last notion, so crucial to Pig Iron's work, is one upon which the group enlarges with a narrative twist that concludes *Lucia Joyce*. Throughout the piece, Lucia assigns a variety of roles, including those of her loved ones, to her fellow performers; and she is often reflexive about her casting choices and their effects, as when she says of Nicholas enacting her failed romance with Beckett, "Thank you, Nicholas. You are more Samuel Beckett than Samuel Beckett. [...] You are SO Sam Beckett. Ladies and gentlemen, isn't he simply the MOST Sam Beckett Beckett you've ever seen?" (Stein et al. 2005:8–9). After the "real" James Joyce (James Sugg) turns up at the cabaret and sends Lucia into a tailspin of neediness, melancholy, and rage (in short, of overwhelming, and overweening, love), a minor character (Jane Moore), the oldest of the hospital's residents, steps forward to contain the damage—and to reveal herself as the true Lucia, surrogated throughout the performance by a much younger, talented proxy who makes "all these people fall in love with Lucia Joyce" until she is undone by "her" father's appearance (47). Recapitulating that very proxy's earlier language, the older Lucia concludes, wistfully, "You were a very good Lucia. You were more Lucia than Lucia. But when you really let Lucia be Lucia, they sedate you" (48). Far from negating the empathy that we have invested in the younger Lucia, this speech asks us to continue our investment of empathy precisely because, not in spite of, its predication on the acting body's mediation. What's more, the narrative turn of which this speech is a part doubles our empathy as it asks us to extend it to another embodied subject, the older Lucia, who has also weathered cruel blows (both women know punishments like sedation) and who can likewise say to the audience, in a direct quotation of one of her semblable's earliest lines, "Without you

Figure 7. Mad Margaret, later revealed to be Lucia Joyce (Jane Moore), and James Joyce (James Sugg), James Joyce Is Dead and So Is Paris: The Lucia Joyce Cabaret*, 21 April 2005, Christ Church Neighborhood House, Philadelphia. (© Jacques-Jean Tiziou/www.jjtiziou.net)*

I am nothing. A shoelace, a shipwreck, a sham" (49). The alliteration of multiplied *sh*'s underscores the amplification of our feeling for Lucia(s), as original and copy merge in a final song and a final spotlight on their closely juxtaposed faces. Indeed, no credible basis remains for calibrating the distance or difference between original and copy, whose fusion becomes a figure for the reciprocal, empathic relationship between audience and performer that Pig Iron seeks to elicit from its movement-based approach.

"We Put the Human Condition Onstage and We Make It Dance"

To render schizophrenia, ever and still an ill-defined and insufficiently understood cluster of phenomena, as a metaphor for the radical artist's performative journey or condition puts Pig Iron's work in a genealogy that stretches at least as far back as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. In that (in)famous work on the relationship between capitalism and schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari celebrate the schizophrenic, "a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch" ([1972] 1983:2), for illuminating two kinds of movement away from or against the limits of capitalist hegemony: "the metaphysical process that puts us in contact with the 'demoniacal' element in nature or within the heart of the earth, and the historical process of social production that restores the autonomy of [desire]" (35). In contradistinction to the schizophrenic's unfettered and unfettering "body without organs" (35), Deleuze and Guattari invoke a sad counterpart, the autistic subject whom they, guided by misconceptions about autism still dominant at the time of their writing, figure as "the schizophrenic who has made himself into an artificial person" (24). Writing recently from her own experience of autism and after recalibrations of the medical misunderstandings that haunt Deleuze and Guattari's account, Temple Grandin notes, nevertheless, that "[t]here is still confusion in diagnosing between autism and schizophrenia" and attributes this confusion to the ways in which the so-called "negative symptoms [of schizophrenia] often resemble the lack of affect seen in adults with autism" (2006:39).

Given the history of romanticizing schizophrenia—often at autism's expense—and the continued lack of rigor and nuance in approaches to autism, we may be surprised to find an autistic subject, Dmitri (James Sugg), figured complexly as a kind of artist at the center of Pig Iron's *Chekhov Lizardbrain*, just as schizophrenic Lucia Joyce was positioned as the governing creative force of the group's earlier cabaret. In order to create this unusual portrait, the group draws explicitly on Grandin's account of her subjectivity and consciousness in *Thinking with Pictures* (2006), as well as on her adaptive account of Paul MacLean's triune brain theory in *Animals in Translation* (2005), to present the life narrative of Dmitri and his memories of buying a house from three brothers in upstate New York. As Pig Iron's engagement with Grandin's work (and as the title of *Chekhov Lizardbrain*) suggests, this presentation is, however, no straightforward one. Rather, the play animates Dmitri's memories as filtered through the magical, subjunctive mood of the theatre: that is, as if Dmitri's recollected experiences were (distorted) scenes from Chekhov's plays, and as if the distortions resulted from the mediating influence of his alter ego, an emcee called Chekhov Lizardbrain (also played by James Sugg), who protects him from the injuries that Dmitri fears will result from appearing, vulnerable, before an audience. At the same time, Chekhov Lizardbrain's shielding of Dmitri allows him to revel in the insouciant collision of Chekhovian tropes with conventions of popular theatrical forms like vaudeville and circus. Thus the play fuses two agendas: to disclose dimensions of autistic thought without presuming to present autism unproblematically or with the semblance of transparency; and to disclose dimensions of Chekhov's thought so that it will be relevant and exciting to a 21st-century audience. And the play suggests that what relates these two agendas is the impossibility of imagining another consciousness, whether the marginalized autistic subject's or the lionized author's, without inevitably introducing the intervening operations of metaphor: there is no presenting Dmitri without making him both Dmitri *and* Chekhov Lizardbrain, and there is no (satisfying) re-presentation of Chekhov without making him, too, Chekhov Lizardbrain—with the result

that this necessary figure (after all, the master of ceremonies) becomes the eponymous one of the piece.[1]

It is, nevertheless, Dmitri as himself who opens the play with a moving and intensely physical ritual. The playing area is a white circle in front of a lush, red velvet curtain, and that circle is bounded by a series of red velvet ropes hanging on silver stanchions, much like the ones that corral audience members at a theatre. To begin the proceedings, an exploration of "The Menagerie of Human Possibility" (Quillen Camp et al. 2010:4), Dmitri walks around the circle's roped perimeter. His movements are halting, furtive, and anxious; he lingers with an expectant hover at each stanchion, where he obsessively clicks each clip that connects rope to pole, then lurches forward in an awkward lope to the next stanchion. More than any words that Dmitri could or will say, the physically detailed and precise circle that he draws connotes how painfully shy he is (a shyness that results, we may later conclude, from the world's reception of his autism)—and how that painful shyness leads him to invent the charismatic alter ego, Chekhov Lizardbrain, who wears a top hat and coattails and who insists that he won't let Dmitri's "penchant for *l'attack du panique* hold up the show" as he, "man about town," "put[s] the human condition onstage and [...] make[s] it dance" (5). But that dance is, like the playing area itself, a circumscribed one, as Chekhov Lizardbrain, however much more confident than his alter ego, must still inhabit and work within the confines of Dmitri's tense body and minimal affect. Thus Chekhov Lizardbrain's comically stylized and audience-engaging "self"-presentation is only a limited translation of Dmitri's behavioral repertoire. Like his "conjoined twin" (5), he speaks

Figure 8. The eponymous emcee (James Sugg), Chekhov Lizardbrain*, 21 March 2007, Latvian Society of Philadelphia. (Courtesy of Pig Iron Theatre Company)*

1. Not surprisingly, emcees are recurring figures in Pig Iron's presentational work, inspired routinely by cabaret and vaudeville. Emcees organize the action not only in *Lucia Joyce* and *Chekhov Lizardbrain*, but also in such other pieces as *Mission to Mercury* (2000) and the recent *"For the Love of Pig Iron" Benefit Cabaret* (2010), hosted by Martha Graham Cracker (a drag alter ego created by Dito van Reigersberg).

dully and flatly, yet in a lower register that connotes the self-possession missing from Dmitri's high, strained voice. Similarly, we see in Chekhov Lizardbrain's gestural range the residue of Dmitri's jerks, sidesteps, and disjointed angularity, but with all of those qualities made markedly reptilian—and therefore oddly charming. His syncopated slithers and stretched fingers, pointed askew, are a fantastical bodily manifestation of the "neurons firing across the lower medulla oblongata" (6); they characterize, at once poetically and humorously, the operations of the oldest and deepest part of the human brain, which "corresponds to that in lizards and performs basic life support functions like breathing" (Grandin and Johnson 2005:54).

The yoking of the two subjects, the necessary condition of Chekhov Lizardbrain's performance, is richly suggested by the ceremonial act that inaugurates the emcee's coming-into-being. After Dmitri completes his walk around the circle's edge, he enters the playing area with trepidation and approaches a costume dummy adorned with his alter ego's hat and clothes. The play's stage directions indicate that Dmitri "looks at the red velvet curtain [and] pushes the dummy through the red curtain and offstage" (3), where he transforms into Chekhov Lizardbrain; but before he does so, he turns the dummy away from the audience, likewise turns his back, puts his arm slowly and tentatively around the dummy's stiff middle and loose sleeve, and leans his head softly against its padded shoulder. During some performances, this rich, charged act earns a laugh from audiences, and I read that laughter as a nervous and uncomfortable response to a rendering of the dilemma, common among autistic subjects, of "crav[ing] pressure stimulation even though they cannot tolerate being touched. It is much easier for a person with autism to tolerate touch if he or she initiates it" (Grandin 2006:58). Indeed, later in the show, Dmitri stands stiffly and uncertainly when given a sudden and disarming hug by Sascha (Geoff Sobelle), the youngest of three brothers from whom he has bought a house and the one member of the family devastated by the loss of his childhood home. In response to what he perceives as Dmitri's withholding, Sascha lashes out, "You're extremely weird, you know. You're very cold. And you don't—talk normally" (Quillen Camp et al. 2010:67), a cruelty that Dmitri will overwrite when he misremembers of Sascha, "and he, he loved me too and I can tell you that, he was very fond of me, and we would have been really good friends. We would have been really close, we would have been like brothers, we would have been like twins, we would have, like conjoined twins" (69)—a recapitulation of the language with which Chekhov Lizardbrain describes his relationship to the intensely lonely Dmitri at the beginning of the play.

In fact, the phantasmatic Chekhov Lizardbrain is the only proxy with whom Dmitri may enjoy the closeness that he simultaneously misses and fears in his encounters with other human beings. The alter ego fulfills one of Dmitri's deep needs by putting a stopgap between him and the otherwise unfiltered memories of those encounters, which deluge and torture him for the ways in which they picture vividly his misfit and unease in social situations. I use the word *picture* here because Dmitri's memories do indeed rush over him as (stage) pictures, an exceptional phenomenon that Grandin describes: "I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-color movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head" (2006:3). "I can view [the pictures] from any angle, placing myself above or below [them] and rotating [them] at the same time. I don't need a fancy graphics program that can produce three-dimensional design simulations. I can do it better and faster in my head" (5). For Grandin, this way of experiencing memory is a gift that aids her insights as an innovator of animal husbandry;[2] but for Dmitri, the experience is a painful curse that he would wish away, and his wish takes the form of a counterfactual and angry denial of one such memory, even though we have already seen it play out:

2. Grandin is the inventor of a number of revolutionary livestock handling devices. Her "restraint systems keep animals calm and prevent them from getting hurt, and her center-track restraint system is currently used to handle nearly half of all the cattle in North America" (Famous Women Inventors 2008).

> [W]hat you just saw is not approved by the Worldwide League of Mental Gymnasia. Memory's not like a film, it's not precise. You can't just replay it. You can't just throw it on the projector and replay it, memory has to be re-created, it has to be rethought, reimagined every single time. Memory is not like film, that's the number one rule of consciousness. (Quillen Camp et al. 2010:14)

Whatever rules govern the consciousnesses of the statistically average, Dmitri is subject to exactly the sort of projections that he aims to banish (after this speech, a projector, represented by a flashing light bulb and the sound of a film reel, whirrs to life, and Dmitri tries but fails to turn it off); and when he succeeds in their banishment, his victory comes from the intervention of Chekhov Lizardbrain, who does precisely the "rethinking" and "reimagining" of his memories that Dmitri believes the "Worldwide League of Mental Gymnasia" would approve. Memory's re-creation serves to shield Dmitri from reliving his isolation and underappreciation; in the emcee's playful and spirited dramaturgy, Dmitri is invited to whimsical parties, appreciated for idiosyncratic talents like birdhouse-painting, and fondly remembered as a childhood friend of Sascha and his brothers—when, in reality, Dmitri only knew in childhood (and not very well) one of the brothers, Nicholas (Dito van Reigersberg), who is desperate to unload the dilapidated house that he and his brothers have inherited from their deceased mother.

Figure 9. Dmitri (James Sugg), Nikolai (Dito van Reigersberg), Sascha (Geoff Sobelle), and Pyotr (Quinn Bauriedel), Chekhov Lizardbrain*, 21 March 2007, Latvian Society of Philadelphia. (Courtesy of Pig Iron Theatre Company)*

At the same time that Chekhov Lizardbrain's re-creations overlay Dmitri's unvarnished memories with color and joy, they also adapt elements of *The Cherry Orchard* and *Three Sisters*, both of which are echoed in the situation between Dmitri and the three brothers. In Chekhov Lizardbrain's imaginative rendering, those echoes are amplified—and distorted—according to the following, a parodically cheeky conception of "Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's 'Five Rules of Theatre'":

> One. Every play has four acts.
> That's simple enough. Four acts.
> Two. Keep the tragedy offstage.
> I don't want to see that onstage. It's tragedy.
> Three. Who owns the house? [...]
> Four. Every play has exactly one central symbol. [...]
> Five. Keep it clean, keep it civil.
> That means no shouting, no taunting, and no cursing.
>
> Let's try it again with a little dignity, as befits us. Let's try it with some respect. (Quillen Camp et al. 2010:21–22)

But dignity and respect are precisely what Chekhov Lizardbrain compromises—and delightfully so—in the scenes that unfold according to these criteria. Denied, for example, the

opportunity to "shout," "taunt," and "curse" at each other as real brothers do (and as Dmitri inadvertently spies the three brothers doing when they argue about the sale of the house), Nicholas, Peter (Bauriedel), and Sascha, rechristened as Nikolai, Pyotr, and Sascha, "become a chorus of Lizardbrains" who mutter near-jibberish and move awkwardly but spiritedly to simulate the "very upsetting talk" whose direct presentation the emcee deems unseemly (49). The irreverent display that ironically ensues is just a fuller elaboration of the clowning that otherwise steers Chekhov Lizardbrain's vision: the brothers wear top hats, long underwear, and fake mustaches whose deliberately visible, securing straps call to mind the similar bands on clown noses; and, in these costumes, they enact a series of exaggeratedly "decorous" movements (like sweeping, synchronized bows and hat doffs) that often give way to giddy skipping, frenetic whirling, and other forms of balletic slapstick. In one such scene, in which the brothers throw a birthday party for Sascha, they perform a folk dance "and swirl around the room happily" as Nikolai intones, "And right foot, and left foot and chicken chicken chicken chicken" (27). This dance—which starts by marrying the footwork of a traditional jig to the arm-flapping of its unhappy successor, the Happy Chicken—gives way to full-blown leaps and pirouettes as the brothers circle the stage in an exuberant echo of Dmitri's sad, circle-drawing ritual from the top of the play. Later, and in an even more boisterous display, Chekhov Lizardbrain and the brothers perform a floating-head trick of which Sascha boasts, self-mockingly, "What you are about to see tonight has never been seen onstage, human or otherwise" (45). Now behaving as Lizardbrains, the brothers hop, frog-like, onto and off a bench as the opening gambit of yet another dance in which they run in a circle around the stage—but this time with reptilian squats and jolts meant to body forth the sensations of "hunger, reflex, startling, and temperature," the sensations ostensibly controlled by the "lizardbrain" (Reigersberg 2010). As a response to this spectacle, Chekhov Lizardbrain's head appears between the folds of the red curtain, while Sugg hides his body behind the folds; his movements up and down thus simulate the floating of his head, an invitation for the brothers to throw their top hats lightly back and forth

Figure 10. Nikolai (Dito van Reigersberg), Pyotr (Quinn Bauriedel), and Dmitri (Geoff Sobelle), Chekhov Lizardbrain*, 21 March 2007, Latvian Society of Philadelphia. (Courtesy of Pig Iron Theatre Company)*

to each other and forcefully at the floating head, in a carefully timed piece of clowning reminiscent at once of the Three Stooges' routines and of the hat-passing game in *Waiting for Godot*.

In these moments, the enchanted space of the white circle becomes not only the interior of the brothers' house or the interior of Dmitri's mind, but also a citational emblem of theatrical space as such—and of theatre as practiced specifically by Pig Iron. Just as "the whole house is falling apart" when new owner Dmitri is left in charge of its maintenance (69), so, too, but in a comically affirmative register, does *Chekhov Lizardbrain* suggest that theatre itself must, in a way, fall apart: theatre practitioners must challenge a pious view of icons like Chekhov and must refuse a tidy separation of his legacy from its popular equivalents if theatre is to keep moving forward and to continue having the captivating effect that Chekhov Lizardbrain wishes to produce when he introduces himself, reflexively, with the words, "Ta daaaa" (4).

Those introductory words are also the final ones of the play, intoned the second time by Chekhov Lizardbrain not to underline his own performance but to gloss a monologue in which Dmitri lays bare precisely what the emcee has protected with his adaptively Chekhovian and physically robust mediations: Dmitri's fragile self in thought. To attempt to communicate in spare, direct address what the play has elsewhere insisted is only (partially) conveyable in movement and intertextuality is a big risk. And the risk does not pay off for all audience members, including the reviewer who wonders of the monologue, as it "becomes faster, more repetitive, and less comprehensible": "We are at a loss and want to forgive [Sugg as Dmitri], but the performer/spectator dyad—even in a performance as unconventional as this—prevents us from reaching out. Perhaps we have been 'pushed' too far?" (DiNucci 2007:664). While I don't wish to invalidate this response to the monologue, I would submit that Pig Iron has earned the right, at work's end, to "push" and to venture toward something like realism precisely because the foregoing performance has meticulously prepared us for the probability of realism's failure. And whatever the likelihood of its misfire, the monologue achieves at least one important effect related to that very potential for misfire: revealing the similar possibility that an exploration of autistic experience rooted in movement may sometimes fail, too.

In the monologue, Dmitri speaks elliptically of "fall[ing] down the stairs" and "picking [his] body up" (Quillen Camp et al. 2010:71), and this seeming memory of traumatic childhood abuse suggests that Sascha's verbal cruelty to Dmitri shows us only a mild version of the animus that Dmitri's autism has otherwise and more violently incited in others. Pig Iron makes the gamble, to my mind a well-judged one, not to show us this kind of violence but to test whether our empathy for its victim, our "reaching out," may be better served by hearing him speak of it—and then only obliquely. In *Chekhov Lizardbrain*'s final moments, the group aims for a delicacy of approach that achieves, for me, real poignancy as that approach is counterpoised with the rambunctious physicality of the preceding display—and, indeed, of most of Pig Iron's other work. Confronting and testing the limits of that work's routine operations is a way to ensure its continued freshness and relevance.

Coda: "Beginning with the Body"

Pig Iron's co-artistic directors identify three projects with which the company will move forward in 2010 and beyond: the publication of an anthology of Pig Iron scripts, all of which have been developed collaboratively by playwrights working with Pig Iron's members and which include the scripts for *Lucia Joyce* and *Chekhov Lizardbrain*; the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which may incorporate robotics work that the group is exploring with engineering students at the University of Pennsylvania (Reigersberg 2010) and which will, in Dan Rothenberg's words, "let loose the purity of playfulness" (in Apple 2010); and the establishment of a Pig Iron training conservatory, which will offer a two-year certificate program for performer/creators and ensemble performers whose work, inspired by Lecoq training and Pig Iron's own journey, will teach them how to "lead a process rather than be [...] interpreter[s] of scripts" (Bauriedel 2010). While the precise curricular content of the conservatory has not yet been established, the spirit

guiding Pig Iron's commitment to pedagogical work is already expressed in the online description of "Presence, Play, and the Red-Nose Clown," a three-week intensive training program in movement-based performance that the group offered for June 2010:

> Collaboration. Risk-taking. The pleasure of performance.
>
> Beginning with the body, Pig Iron's Summer Session in Philadelphia aims to train performers to be flexible, fearless, present, passionate and disciplined. The goal is to give students the skills to develop their own artistic voice while being grounded in the values of collaboration, experimentation, risk, and a curiosity about the world around us. [...]
>
> Rooted in Pig Iron's own artistic questions and performance techniques, the intensive workshop is intended to launch performers into the world of physically precise, emotionally rich, imaginatively constructed original theatre. (Pig Iron Theatre Company 2010b)

Just as the forthcoming production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* indicates Pig Iron's abiding investment in adaptation's possibilities, so, too, does the summer program highlight the group's continued commitment to the kind of physically intricate and detailed training that its own members received at L'École Jacques Lecoq. Whatever the project, Pig Iron's end is always in the "beginning with the body" to which the group's collaborative work owes its special flavor—and with which its legacy may endure not only in the theatrical endeavors that the company produces but also in the next generation of practitioners that it teaches. As Gabriel Quinn Bauriedel notes, Pig Iron's conservatory will "help reinvent the company" as a "feeder" of and "practice ground" for new company members; but at the same time, the conservatory will ideally "encourage people to start their own companies"—and, when they do, "hopefully [their work] will look very different" from the work of their Pig Iron teachers (2010).

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