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GERICAULT'S MONOMANIACS AND AN ALIENIST'S VISION

Science progresses; art changes. Scientists are interchangeable and anonymous before their universal achievements; artists are idiosyncratic and necessary creators of their unique masterpieces.

Stephen Jay Gould, *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms*

Introduction

This is not an essay about honorific portraiture. There are no faces of authority or lineage in the portraits that I will examine. Rather it is about the portrayal of an abject human condition that has preoccupied the minds of human beings for thousands of years. Gericault's five portraits of monomaniacs (Fig. 1) present us with the faces of people marginalized and considered as 'other' to the dominant morality of the society in which they lived. We, the viewers of these images, are presented with faces depicting one of the greatest human fears – that of losing one's reason.

These images arose out of a collaborative effort between an alienist and a painter. The term 'alienist' was attached to men who were medical superintendents within asylums, whilst the term 'psychiatrist' came to be attached to those who 'scientifically' studied the condition of insanity, usually outside the asylum itself. Etienne Georget, an alienist and Gericault's collaborator in the monomaniac project, is situated at the moment of this change – just as psychiatry was beginning to define itself as a scientific discipline. The early discipline of psychiatry relied heavily on portraiture to illustrate the manifestation of unreason in the human being, often using the face as a zone for scientific categorisation of insanity. For artists, the face has ever been a zone for metaphor and imagination. It is through the expressiveness and profundity of the human visage that artists allude to the physical condition of the body. There is also a vast and documented history of the 'art of the mad' and that of artists who were preoccupied with the notion of unreason. Many artists have been proclaimed 'mad' by psychiatric authorities, while others such as Ernst Kirchner, Max Ernst, Paul Klee and Antonin Artaud have openly celebrated the condition. According to Roy Porter:

The disturbed have expressed themselves not just *verbally*, in countless autobiographical outpourings, but *visually* too, by drawing, painting, and making things. Long before 'art therapy' was recognized, it was not unknown for asylum patients to be permitted to draw ... The paintings of the insane, according to Lombroso, were characterized by distortion, originality, imitation, repetition, absurdity, arabesques, eccentricity, obscenity, and, above all, symbolism – a rather comprehensively incriminatory list. The implied moral was that if the mad painted like that, then those who painted like that were mad. And that is precisely the verdict passed by certain psychiatrists upon Expressionists, Surrealists, and other avant garde artists. Cezanne and the Cubists were suffering from neurological eye complaints, judged Theodore Hyslop, physician to Bethlem, and no mean artist himself and author of *The Great Abnormals* (1925).¹

In these five paintings by Gericault, two agendas are operating both separately and co-dependently. They are the result of a unique collaboration between two individuals specialised in completely different disciplines, although it is possible, and indeed likely, that each had a layman's interest in the other's discipline. In order to understand these paintings and their complexity it is necessary to examine the imperatives of both the artist and the alienist in the making of these pictures.

Little concrete information exists that in any way elucidates the reasons for the production of these paintings. In an art historical context, they seem to stand at the edge of Romantic consciousness, inhabiting a shifting margin between documentary realism and high art. These paintings take insanity as their subject, but it is not a romantic notion of insanity that is

portrayed in the features of the five monomaniacs by Gericault. There is no Ophelia, no Hamlet, no drama and no dark romance. Here we have five individuals whose cursory appearance is so ordinary as to be unremarkable. What is transmitted through these paintings is the unease with which these sitters are 'subjects' in the traditional sense of being subjects for a portrait. These individuals appear completely unaware of the presence of the artist or the viewer; they are withdrawn. Their gaze is distracted and inward looking.

The art historian Albert Boime argues in regard to these paintings that:

The mystery concerning these paintings quickly dissipates as soon as the emphasis of study is shifted to the demands of the patron and the nascent psychiatric profession in its attempt to delineate its own separate identity within a complex of other behavioural and clinical fields.²

Albert Boime's argument in respect to these paintings is, he states, a Foucaultian one in that he insists that the desire of the alienist to entrench the profession of psychiatry within valid medical and legal parameters was the predominant motivation for these paintings. Whilst the influence of the alienist obviously played a seminal role in the production of the paintings, I believe that ultimately it is the vision, imagination and experience of the artist that enables these paintings to resonate with an intense psychological ambience that is still intriguing. I would argue that an account that emphasises, as Boime appears to do, their role purely as medical illustrations overlooks their psychological intensity and the capacity these paintings have to evoke the experience of unreason, not just to render it objectively.

Michel Foucault, the twentieth century philosopher wrote a seminal thesis entitled *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. His analysis concerning the discourse of madness is essentially that the profession of psychiatry sought to establish itself through a scientific/medical dialogue that viewed madness as a medical condition rather than a moral one: that this process of classification of mental ailment by scientists and physicians silenced the voices of the mad themselves, causing them to become invisible and thus able to be used as fodder for experimentation within a powerful system of brutal surveillance.

The science of mental disease, as it would develop in the asylum, would always be only of the order of observation and classification. It would not be a dialogue. It could not be that until psychoanalysis has exorcised this phenomenon of observation, essential to the nineteenth-century asylum, and substituted for its silent magic the power of language.³

Whilst I do not deny the validity of Michel Foucault's theories in regard to the construction of, and discourse on madness in early nineteenth century society, I would argue that in establishing a valid historical rationale for his arguments concerning the silencing of the mad, he presents an account of selected, often obscure facts and incidents that support his argument. He does not take into account the many and varied treatments of madness and the progress made in other parts of Europe other than France, in the housing and treatment of insane individuals. Like Roy Porter, I argue a more median position: that the motivations of the psychiatric profession were on the one hand philanthropic and on the other self-motivated or essentially cruel, ignoring or dismissive of the words that came from the mouths of their patients.

It would thus be simplistic to cast the rise of institutional psychiatry in crudely functional terms, as a new witch-hunt or a tool of social control designed to smooth the running of the emergent industrial society. The asylum solution should be viewed less in terms of central policy than as the site of myriad negotiations of wants, rights, and responsibilities, between diverse parties in a mixed consumer economy with a burgeoning service sector. The confinement (and subsequent release) of a sufferer was commonly less a matter of official fiat than the product of complex bargaining between families, communities, local officials, magistrates, and the [asylum] superintendents themselves.⁴

I do not believe that Albert Boime makes a ‘Foucaultian argument’. By entrenching these paintings solely within the realms of the psychiatrist’s concerns, he dismisses at least half of the story concerning the paintings and confines them to a particular set of circumstances.

Foucault’s interventions into law and psychiatry have provided a theoretical warrant to problematise such fields in ways which emphasise their convergences and interrelations.⁵

Albert Boime’s argument that these paintings are primarily a result of Georget’s influence and his efforts to gain popular support to entrench the profession of psychiatry within the medical, legal and scientific disciplines is, I believe a hermetic one. It is a simplification of the works themselves through which Boime consigns these paintings to the realms of science, isolating them outside the oeuvre of Gericault’s overall artistic production.

To look at these paintings only in terms of Foucault’s views of nineteenth century science does not account for Gericault’s rendering of these monomaniacs in terms of their humanity. It is true that the symptoms of their mental condition would have been apparent to those knowledgeable in the identification of psychological disorder, but it is not the symptomology of the paintings that engages the viewer so intensely.

I will examine this series of portraits in the light of social, personal, and scientific influences that may be been brought to bear in the production of these paintings. Because at a cursory glance, these portraits appear to stand apart in the oeuvre of Gericault, I believe this mode of analysis to be necessary in order to derive a comprehensive meaning from these paintings. I do not believe that these paintings should be isolated from Gericault’s overall production.

I will argue that Gericault was concerned with the physical and emotive expressiveness of the human face: analysis of his work prior to the painting of the monomaniacs bears this out. I will argue that the portraits of monomaniacs are imbued with a sense of what I call ‘compassionate objectivity’. By this I mean that whilst Gericault was possessed of a certain amount of scientific objectivity, the intense proximity involved in the act of painting from life within the confines of the asylum, means that he entered into the confinement of his subjects both physically and metaphorically, in a sense sharing their experience. I believe this sense of experience is conveyed in the paintings and is apparent to the beholder, making them powerful and moving works of art that have, in more recent times, become of interest to art historians, theorists and artists.

These paintings must be examined in the context of their time, as their production arose from prevailing societal concern with the subject of insanity. By exploring, even fleetingly, the conditions out of which these paintings were produced, it is possible to see how we, contemporary beings, are still possessed by many of the same profound issues confronting nineteenth century Western civilization and that our responses are mediated by some of the values, particularly in the reading of face and expression, that have evolved throughout the history of science and visual images.

The faces of these monomaniacs act as a window onto a particularly pervasive concern of Gericault’s society: - that of the unreasoned human being. These paintings raise questions of what it is to be deemed insane. How is madness defined? How do we (artist, psychiatrist, viewer) differentiate between unreason and reason? If unreason is measured against reason, then how is reason to be quantified? These questions do not have definitive answers, they have been and still are the subject of endless research and debate. They reach deep into recesses of the ordinary imagination and have preoccupied artists, writers, philosophers and thinkers for thousands of years:

The thinking on the psyche developed in the fifth and fourth centuries BC set the mould for mainstream reasoning about minds and madness in the West, as was tacitly acknowledged by

Freud when he named infantile psycho-sexual conflicts the ‘Oedipus Complex’, paying tribute to Sophocles’ play. Greek drama combines elements of both traditional and of newer casts of mind.⁶

Gericault painted these portraits of monomaniacs at a time in the history of madness when that condition was being sharply redefined by medicine, science and law. Etienne Georget was a pivotal proponent for the study of madness to become a medico-legal science. These paintings occur at a juncture in the history of madness when the concept of the discipline of modern psychiatry was beginning to define itself. The ‘unreasoned’ of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were to become overwhelmingly colonised by science and medicine and the structures of empirical thought that would silence them and force them to endure the barbarity of nineteenth century scientific enquiry:

...That whole vertical hierarchy which constituted the structure of classical madness, from the cycle of material causes to the transcendence of delirium, would now collapse and spread over the surface of a domain which psychology and morality would soon occupy together and contest with each other.

The “scientific psychiatry” of the nineteenth century became possible. It was in these disease[s] of the nerves and in these “hysterias” that this psychiatry took its origin.⁷

To describe the paintings without the context of Gericault’s preoccupations, his overall oeuvre, the emerging profession of psychiatry and the part that the condition of monomania was to play in this emergence, would be to deny the full implications of these paintings. What they depict goes beyond the individual subject of the paintings and encompasses a stream of consciousness that was particular to Western societies generally at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as well as being entirely within the boundaries of Gericault’s artistic concerns. These paintings do not have comparable equivalents to be found in the art historical records of early nineteenth century painting. However, some exchange occurs between Gericault’s portraits of monomaniacs, honorific portraiture and medical illustration and this will be elaborated upon during the course of this text.

When an artist imaginatively engaged with his subject is thrown together with a scientific professional who has a desire to illustrate his theories on the same subject (in this instance madness), at a point in history when insanity seemed of particular relevance to society and pervaded much of the culture, then a particular mode of ‘looking’ could be brought to bear upon the subject – a compassionate, objective gaze. Encompassing the faculties of both reason and reverie, the subjects of the monomaniac portraits appear before the viewer holistically, setting up a dialogue that goes beyond the immediate visage as being representative of insanity and causes the viewer to ask how and why these images have occurred.

These paintings have occupied an ambivalent space between the disciplines of art and science, never to be quite accepted as art historical portraits or scientific documentation. Consequently, they have languished as aberrations or curiosities with little serious critical attention paid them. However, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries these portraits have begun to receive more serious theoretical consideration as the discipline of art theory has evolved to incorporate broader themes than the traditional categories of art history. Most of the writing that has occurred over the years, in relation to these monomaniac portraits has succeeded in isolating the images outside of Gericault’s oeuvre, as masterly aberrations. This I believe contributes to a subtle misreading of the works themselves and their relationship to Gericault’s other work.

My intent in the following pages is to redress the balance and locate these images integrally within the historical record of Gericault’s unusual artistic production and to reinforce their relationship to a moment in French history and the discipline of psychiatry.

As I conclude these words of introduction, I prepare for a day's work at a 'high level dementia facility'. An institution of high fences and baffling locks that contains some of the frailest people in our society - mostly aged, mostly suffering various forms and degrees of mental malady loosely categorized under the heading 'dementia'.

I will spend the day in close physical and emotional proximity with these people deemed unreasoned and incapable of functioning independently. I will tend to the physical needs and, as time permits, the emotional needs of the frail people in my care. Whilst pondering the history of madness I will draw the faces of these people as I imagine Gericault may have done.

The Alienists

Prominent physicians and alienists of the seventeenth century were probably among the first scientific professionals to explore the dimensions and features of the head and human visage in any cogent albeit pseudo-scientific way. The profession of modern psychiatry and psychology in all their variant forms arose from the ashes of 'scientific theories' propounded by the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century practitioners of alienism, phrenology and early psychiatry.

...[Before the nineteenth century] it was to theology and metaphysics that natural philosophers looked for an understanding of man's nature and role in society.

The social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the advances in the physical sciences completely undermined this view. Man came to be thought of as part of the natural world, subject to the same physical laws as the rest of God's creation. The separation of mind and body was denied and, in the words of James Ward, 'so far as knowledge extends all is law, and law ultimately and most clearly to be formulated in terms of matter and motion'.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this was still largely an avant-garde notion associated with the revolutionary movement in France. The ruling class in Britain saw the French Revolution as a threat to the prevailing social order, and strongly resisted the doctrine that man in all his endeavours, physical and mental, was subject to the laws of nature. It was in phrenology that this latter view found its earliest expression.⁸

The history of the psychiatric profession is complex and convoluted. There is not one definitive history as the treatment of madness varied between countries, institutions, individual specialists and interested parties. To explicate a full history of madness and its treatment would require the length of a considerable tome, so here I concentrate primarily on the French stream of psychiatric development as it is within the French environment that Gericault and Georget's collaboration took place.

Much has been written on the history of the treatment of madness throughout the ages. Writers such as Michel Foucault and Thomas Szasz critique the psychiatric profession as a 'pseudo science', condemning psychiatric practices of categorisation and the delineation of the parameters of mental illness, interpreting this process as a method of imprisonment of those deemed 'other to the prevailing morality of a particular society':

Psychiatry is conventionally defined as a medical specialty concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of mental diseases. I submit that this definition, which is still widely accepted, places psychiatry in the company of alchemy and astrology and commits it to the category of pseudo-science.⁹

Both Szasz and Foucault argue that ‘mental illness must be understood not as a natural fact but as a cultural construct, sustained by a grid of administrative and medico-psychiatric practices.’¹⁰

Esquirol, one of the leading lights of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century psychiatry, also intimated much the same idea when describing the condition of monomania:

All scientific progress, artistic inventions and other important innovations have unfailingly become the causes, and influenced the character of monomanias.¹¹

The implication is that society, culture and science collectively influence the manifestation and categorization of certain mental maladies.

Since the late seventeenth century, Western civilization’s gaze has been firmly focused on the means, causes and identification of mental malady. Its resultant manifestations have been, and continue to be, the inspiration and preoccupation of scientists, doctors, artists, writers, jurists and many other arbiters of western academia and intelligentsia.

Michel Foucault argues in his thesis, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, that before 1657 the mad enjoyed a certain freedom and sometimes status within society. They were generally tolerated in that they were rarely locked up or hidden from society’s gaze. Their wild language and peculiar behavior were often viewed as eccentric and harmless, sometimes profound. Indeed, madness was often eulogized in literature, painting and in philosophic thought as revealing or having access to a kind of truth denied to saner, more prosaic individuals.

In 1657 the ‘great confinement’ took place in France. This saw the incarceration of the criminal, the vagrant, and the insane, in order to keep them from the streets and mingling with ordinary citizenry. However, by the eighteenth century, insanity found itself being redefined and placed under moral scrutiny. It was deemed inappropriate to house the insane with criminals and the like. Insanity came to be viewed with dismay, horror and repugnance; a curse from God in response to amoral thoughts or behavior, and by housing them with criminals and vagrants, it was thought the mental capabilities of these others might be compromised. It seemed more appropriate to house the mad separately in madhouses (*maison de fous*), where they would not contaminate the others. This served the purpose of isolating the mad so they were of no perceivable threat to society.

It is at that moment, Foucault says, that the voices of the mad started to become silent. Their confinement as criminals with criminals at least enabled them to retain their voice as well as having a captive audience in the persons of the others confined with them. However, their separation from other mortals of whatever character, other than the superintendents charged with surveying them, began the process of silencing forever the voices of unreason. It was the precursor to, and facilitated the introduction of, the specialist alienists/psychiatrists and the classificatory systems of analysis used by science and medicine. From this point on, the mad would be defined by their diagnosed mental malady, and their behaviors and words interpreted via the diagnosis.

By the nineteenth century, asylums housing people deemed insane were proliferating in Europe and those involved in the treatment of the mad came to understand that insanity was organic rather than metaphysical in nature, thus attracting the gaze of the scientific and medical communities. The lineal properties, essential to the method of categorisation used then and now by medicine and science, were evident in the work of such alienists as Phillippe Pinel (1745-1826), Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840) and Etienne Georget (1795-1828). That is not to say that they did not contain the taint of subjective

morality such as can be read in the text of Charles Bell, however this was somewhat subsumed beneath a weight of scientific categorisation.

In 1806 Sir Charles Bell, a Scottish physician and anatomist, turned his attention to ‘the question of the statement of the emotions in art.’¹² In a publication titled *Essays on the Anatomy of Statement in Painting*, which was also illustrated by him (Fig. 2), he explicates at great length and in detail the attributes of the unreasoned man that the artist was supposed to illustrate:

You see him lying in his cell regardless of everything, with a death-like fixed gloom upon his countenance. When I say it is a death-like gloom, I mean a heaviness of the features without knitting of the brows or action of the muscles ... his inflamed eye is fixed upon you, and his features lighten up into an inexpressible wildness and ferocity ... [the madman has a] human countenance ... devoid of statement, and reduced to the state of brutality ... [To understand it] we must have recourse to the lower animals; and as I have already hinted, study their statement, their timidity, their watchfulness, their state of excitement, and their ferociousness. If we should happily transfer their statement to the human countenance, we should, as I conceive it, irresistibly convey the idea of madness, vacancy of mind, and mere animal passion.¹³

This situation was to change with the development of modern psychiatry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The 1820’s saw a period of peace all over Europe after years of Napoleonic wars and revolutions. However, in France at this time peace was strained by the reinstatement of the brutal and inept Bourbon monarchy and the banishment of Napoleon to an isolated island prison. Although the great Napoleonic painters of Classicism floundered in a crisis of representation, the values of liberalism that flourished in the sciences were not so inhibited. At the same time, some of the medical and scientific fraternity, most notably the alienists, sought to establish psychiatry as a legitimate branch of science. Lunatics were now sent to large and specialised asylums (*maison de sante*), where specialised guardians familiar with the habits and peculiarities of the mad could control and perhaps ultimately cure them of their malady. The insane remained in complete physical isolation, and discussion of the nature of insanity was reduced to speculation upon their condition by the authorities (scientific, medical and legal), with no acknowledgement of these individuals as having any right to their own articulation or to self-determination.

Philippe Pinel was the founder of the ‘third generation’ of modern psychiatry. He was responsible for the ‘liberation’ of the mentally ill from prisons, and he wrote at length on madness, its qualities and treatment:

In lunatic hospitals as in despotic governments, it is no doubt possible to maintain by unlimited confinement and barbarous treatment the appearance of order and loyalty ... A degree of liberty (in a hospital) contributes in most instances to diminish the violence of the symptoms and in some to relieve the complaint altogether.¹⁴

Pinel’s pupil, Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol, undertook the methodical classification and description of the main forms of insanity and was a prolific commissioner of medical portraits of the insane. He was a strong believer in the significance of facial and bodily appearance as a diagnostic clue. He wrote:

The physiognomic study of the mentally ill is not merely an exercise in curiosity. This study enables one to decipher the character of the ideas and affects which compose the madness of these patients. What fascinating results could be had from such a study. I have had more than two hundred of the insane sketched. Perhaps I shall one day publish the results of my observations on this theme.¹⁵

In England, the discipline of psychiatry was developing rather differently to that in France. In France, the mad were generally housed in large prison-like asylums such as the Salpatriere in Paris. In England, specific ‘lunatic asylums’ and ‘mad-houses’ had been in operation for

hundreds of years, usually run by churches, or similar charity organizations. There were also privately run institutions that catered for the wealthy Briton, and it is in these rather exclusive institutions that the development of the discipline and methodology of psychiatry in England was begun. By the 1830's, such people as Robert Gardiner Hill were renouncing all forms of mechanical coercion of the mad and were instituting instead a system of rigorous surveillance and reportage:

But, it may be demanded, 'What mode of treatment do you adopt, in place of restraint? How do you guard against accidents?' In short, what is the substitute for coercion? The answer may be summed up in a few words, viz – classification – vigilant and unceasing attendance by day and by night – kindness, occupation, and attention to health, cleanliness, and comfort and the total absence of every description of other occupation of the attendant. This treatment in a properly constructed and suitable building, with a sufficient number of strong and active attendants always at their post, is best calculated to restore the patient; and all instruments of coercion and torture are rendered absolutely and in every case unnecessary.¹⁶

Needless to say, treatment at such public institutions caring for the poor and destitute, the mad and sometimes not so mad, such as Bethlem in London, remained harsh and brutal in their treatment. Meantime, in France, balneological (ice water) treatments were a key feature of 'asylum science'.

Of all the different forms of insanity, monomania interested Esquirol most. The medical definition described a particular fixation or a single pathological deviation in an otherwise 'normal' personality. For example, an otherwise completely sane individual may exhibit delusional behavior by believing that he or she was an exalted personality or a prophet or a king. Esquirol believed that the prevalence of monomania reflected the political and social character of early nineteenth century society:

[Monomania] is that which confronts the observer with the most numerous and most profound subjects for reflection. It includes all the mysterious anomalies of feeling and of human understanding, all the perversions of our instincts and aberrations of our passions ... All scientific progress, artistic inventions, and other important innovations have unfailingly become causes, and influenced the character, of monomanias. And this is also true of the dominant ideas, the prevailing errors, the general beliefs, right or wrong, that constitute the life of society.¹⁷

It was upon the diagnosis of the condition 'monomania' in certain criminals brought before the law courts that Esquirol and his disciple Georget would pursue their goal of an insanity defense, thus delivering these individuals into the hands of the psychiatric professionals and their institutions.

In the 1820's, monomania captured the imagination of society, thus finding its way into the language of contemporary culture. The term 'monomania' was used to describe any sort of unusual behavior, (in much the same way that 'obsessive', 'compulsive' and 'schizophrenic' are used today), but only because it had first captured the medical imaginations of the likes of Esquirol and Georget and become a cornerstone of their theoretical investigations. By the 1870's, cases of monomania had all but disappeared. The general definition of monomania has become obsolete in the ongoing subdivision of psychiatric empirical categories. The term virtually vanished from popular, medical, legal and scientific language.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, alienists who wanted to be recognised as medical and scientific professionals, realised it was necessary to illustrate their theories in order to gain wide and popular approbation for their involvement as medico/legal specialists, in the treatment of the unreasoned. Since these theories more often than not concerned the head or face of the subject/patient, an artist was employed to draw the essential components of the head and visage. That the alienist or psychiatrist held some sway over the artist's depiction of the subject is, in the majority of cases, all too true. In most instances a medical portrait

(Fig. 3) was closer to caricature and parody than reality. It served little more than to illustrate the particular theory of the psychiatrist or alienist.

Etienne Georget

Etienne Georget was Esquirol's most favoured pupil, more like a son than a colleague. Georget in fact shared all of Esquirol's ideas concerning mental illness, particularly his notions on the organic and material nature of unreason. However, he took these ideas further than Esquirol ever dared and publicly challenged the draconian Napoleonic penal code of 1810. Its penalties were designed to inspire dread in potential offenders and there was ample use of the death penalty. In contrast stood the ideas of enlightened medicine and science, and the tradition of humanitarian liberalism. It was in pursuit of the ideals of these traditions that Georget was to attempt to lessen the plight of the insane and to promote the profession of psychiatry.

Georget and Gericault were of similar age (Georget being three years younger) and seemed to share some similarities in temperament. Both held radical views that were not consistent with those of the conservative and traditional Bourbon Monarchy. Georget held the dangerous view that the notion of a metaphysical soul was absurd and unscientific, thus God was obsolete, whilst Gericault turned his pencils and paint to depicting the more horrific aspects of life under the Bourbon regime.

At the time of his collaboration with Gericault, Georget was determined to instigate reforms preventing the treatment of the insane as criminals. He was among the first of a generation of psychiatrists to insist that it was essential that medical/psychiatric opinion be employed during court proceedings in order to establish the cognitive capabilities of a defendant. He also argued that persons committing crimes whilst delusional or mad should not be condemned as criminals, but rather be confined to the insane asylum for observation, treatment and possibly cure. This was a radical move and brought derision from the conservative legal establishment. Margaret Miller writes:

Just as the Gericault pictures reveal his subjects in all the understandableness of their dilemma, without a touch of perverse relish in the sensationalism of his subject, so does Georget correct popular misconceptions of the insane and emphasise the comparative normality of their life and conduct.¹⁸

The essence of monomania was that it was not an all-consuming form of insanity, that its qualities were elusive and easily concealed. Georget argued that discerning the signs and symptoms in a person possessed of a monomaniacal condition required the expertise of a trained medical eye. In his 1820 text *On Madness*, Georget comments on the need to observe the appearance of patients as an aid to diagnosis:

It is difficult to describe the physiognomy of the insane. One must observe their physiognomy in order to capture its image. The patients cannot be recognized from their normal state. Their physiognomy is distorted, fully deformed. The physiognomies are different from individual to individual. They vary according to the illness, the various ideas which dominate or motivate them; according to the character of the insanity; the stage of illness, etc. In general the idiot's face is stupid, without meaning; the face of the manic patient is as agitated as his spirit, often distorted and cramped; the moron's facial characteristics are dejected and without expression; the facial characteristics of the melancholic are pinched, marked by pain or extreme agitation; the monomaniacal king has a proud, inflated expression; the religious fanatic is mild, he exhorts by casting his eyes at the heavens or fixing them on the earth; the anxious patient pleads, glancing sideways, etc. I will stop this rather simple listing of patients, for only the direct experience of them can give one an idea of the rest.¹⁹

Georget argued that apart from the obvious physical and behavioural manifestations of some forms of madness, monomania expressed itself only through subtle and fleeting mannerisms.

And while he insisted that monomaniacs could not be held criminally responsible for their actions, he drew attention to the fact that a monomaniac's presence in society might go unnoticed until he or she committed a criminal act. Monomania rejected society's notion of madness as something immediately recognisable.

Georget, in following the tradition of his mentor, Esquirol, must have deemed it necessary to illustrate his theories in order to persuade both his professional colleagues in medicine, science and law, and the general public, of the validity of those theories. But instead of employing the graphic artists that Esquirol used, he seems to have decided that a painter was more appropriate. There are clear reasons why this may have been so. Georget wanted to illustrate what he considered to be the essence of monomania – the fleeting expression, the transitory gesture and the inward and self-conscious gaze. To illustrate his ideas Georget required images that would humanise the mad – images that would appear particularly 'real' so as to arouse empathy in the viewer and cause him to question the nature of this madness that is not immediately recognisable to the 'untrained' eye. In short, it seems as if Georget, in commissioning these portraits or facilitating Gericault's desire to paint faces of insanity, had embarked upon a kind of propaganda campaign to gain popular support for his theories.

The early psychiatrists, like all scientists, needed a visual as well as a theoretical component in order to clearly present their ideas to a fascinated and engaged general public as well as to a skeptical scientific community. Visual material, by its very nature, transcends language barriers and bypasses technical terminology. It can attract attention and provoke interest and inquiry that might not be aroused by a dry textual account. This holds true for today's scientists, as publications, extravagantly illustrated, abound for the reader, scientifically literate or not.

The five extant paintings of monomaniacs represent the identity of monomaniacs that would, in all likelihood, have come into contact with the law: the kidnapper, the kleptomaniac (theft), delusions of military rank (fraud), gambling (if not criminal in itself, then possibly leading to criminal acts), and obsessive envy (also in itself, not criminal behaviour, but containing the possibility of criminality). This would tend to support Boime's view that Georget intended to use these paintings in some way to bolster his argument for a broadening of the insanity defense law. In this way, the legal profession's need for the psychiatric profession's expertise on the subtleties of insanity would be increased. More people would be convicted and confined to insane asylums, thus putting at the psychiatric profession's disposal, a greatly increased number of incapacitated people on which to test their theories.

There appears to be no record and no documentation that tells us if Georget did in fact put these portraits to any practical use. It is known that at the time of his death all ten of the series of portraits by Theodore Gericault were in his possession. Five have since disappeared.

The crisis in French painting in the first decades of the nineteenth century and the complexity of the Gericault character

Michael Fried has written extensively of the 'dramatic conception of painting theorised by Diderot'.²⁰ He argues that Gericault was an artist immersed in the contradictions of the theatrical versus the dramatic. Diderot ascribes a clear difference between theatrical art and dramatic art, considering 'the dramatic' to be a more pure expression of humanity than the theatrical:

What largely determined the course of Gericault's bizarre and baffled career was an inherent tension or contradiction between that antitheatrical ambition and what had become the extreme difficulty, the near-impossibility, of actually realizing such an ambition in large-scale, multifigure,

narratively coherent pictures that could reasonably aspire to take their place in the Davidian succession.²¹

The heroism of the Napoleonic conquests and revolutions were suitable vehicles for grand narratives of 'real' humanity. Not only were the deeds of Napoleon, his generals, adjuncts and armies inspiration and fodder for artists such as Jacques Louis David, Jean-Baptiste Greuze and Antoine-Jean Gros but the Napoleonic administration were patrons and financiers to the arts in general. Under their patronage Neo-Classical painting flourished.

By 1810, patronage of the arts by Napoleon had fallen off as battles were lost across Europe, the Napoleonic Empire shuddered in its death throes and the Bourbon Monarchy positioned itself for reinstatement upon the throne of France. As Eitner comments:

If the Salon of 1810 had shown a slackening, that of 1812 gave evidence of serious decline. Hard pressed by military expenditures, the Imperial Government had reduced its subvention of the arts. In sheer size the Salon of 1812 surpassed all its predecessors, but the importance and quality of the work suggested a general faltering of ambition. David, then aged 64, showed nothing.²²

Serge Guilbaut also delineates a 'crisis of representation, permeating restoration culture'²³:

The restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy, founded on the defeat of the Napoleonic Empire, ushered in new types of repression, censorship and endless returns: [to] the authority of the church, the family and the state. This was a cataclysmic transformation of social structure ... Napoleonic soldiers, who had fought to preserve the revolution while constructing instead a French empire, were denigrated, forced to return to their home towns or pushed into the back alleys of society and transformed into still-proud but helpless derelicts. The beautiful classical body was unable to contain the new shifting and expanding world that, for liberals at least, was beginning to integrate the rights of other cultures, issues of individual and political freedom and forms of modern behavior.²⁴

Fried, Eitner and Guilbaut all comment on this crisis of representation in French academic painting of the early nineteenth century. However, their interpretations concerning Gericault's role as a painter of this period differ. Fried and Guilbaut bring a kind of ultra-modernist interpretation of Gericault as a challenger of tradition, an artist who was witness to and documenter of a crucial rent in the fabric of established French society that would change forever the production of visual images in France. They hail him as an artist who redeemed the dramatic in painting by isolating a singular subject. Eitner, however, writing some twenty years ago links Gericault with the immediate classical past of David and Greuze. Gericault's training was rigorously academic, and although he was to reject many of its precepts he retained a lasting admiration for Classical works, particularly those of Jacques Louis David.

Bruno Chenique in his catalogue essay for *Theodore Gericault. The Alien Body: Tradition in Chaos* shows the reader a Gericault at the heart of insurrection movements associating with some of the most subversive characters of various anti-Bourbon movements, a man involved in industry and commercial investment, a man constantly on the move between Paris, Rome and London. Whether or not he was 'a conspirator through action, thought or omission'²⁵ is undocumented, although it is the one that the writer and poet Louis Aragon would have us believe, when he wrote 'Gericault et Delacroix ou le reel e l'imaginaire' for the Jan 21-28 1954 issue of the literary and arts magazine, *Les Lettres francaises*. In this document he hypothesizes that Gericault's sojourn in Rome, ostensibly for the study of the great art works of the Italian Renaissance, was in fact the site his political initiation:

In Rome he may have become involved with the Carbonari who, in 1815, led the French School and David d'Angers in a revolt in favour of Murat.²⁶

That French society and French Painting in the first decades of the nineteenth century was in turmoil and upheaval is extrapolated upon at great length in the full texts of the documents I have quoted from above. What all of these texts, many others, delineate is the extremely complex character of Gericault and the myriad of readings and interpretations that can be applied to his work.

Theodore Gericault

Gericault began his life as a painter of the French academy in the Tradition of David. This Neo-Classical influence is evident in his 1812 Salon exhibit of *The Charging Chasseur*. (Fig. 4) The painting depicts an officer of the imperial army upon his rearing horse, confronted with a wall of fire, twisting to fend off unseen forces with his curved sword. Gericault's vision, however, was to undergo a radical change as he turned his attention to the streets, to the barbarity of life in a society being ripped apart by the forces of industrialization, commerce and politics.

At one time, art history saw and understood Theodore Gericault as a follower of tradition and the precursor to the Romantic Movement in French nineteenth century art. However, as documentation and exhibitions continue a re-examination of his oeuvre, modern art historians and theoreticians have come to realise the wider significance of his work. Although he was a painter schooled in the theories of the leading institutions and academies, rather than being a follower of tradition he was a painter who willingly seems to violate tradition in order to translate his engagement with social and political issues. He can be seen as an intellectual, cleverly subversive, challenging both the Classical tradition of academic French painting and the political echelons of Restoration society. He used satire and the metaphors of device in the production of his visual imagery to critique particular aspects of French society.

Gericault concerned himself with subjects marginalized by the chill beauty of Classicism. In his work, gone is the ideal, perfectly classical human form. Gericault forces life and death into his bodies with an un-idealistic reality.

He plays with metaphor, satire and oblique referencing through much of his work. Gericault sets up for the person who studies his oeuvre closely, a narrative about a particular break in tradition, a rent in the fabric of society. Rampant mechanisation of industry saw cottage industries and modes of subsistence living swamped beneath cheaply mass-produced goods. The makers of these goods sought and produced economic markets of never-before seen proportions. As their wealth increased, so did their political influence. Fortunes were made and lost almost overnight. This created an ever-increasing gulf between the enormously wealthy and the utterly destitute and it saw the rise of a new and powerful economic class who sought to influence political events.

Gericault portrays a society in the midst of this upheaval and he reveals the underbelly of Western civilisation, pale, exposed, haemorrhaging with people disenfranchised through the detritus of war, colonisation, industrial mechanisation, as well as economic and political revolution. He tries to give an accurate portrayal of society as he saw it, not in the Neo-Classical, heroic style, but heroic, nevertheless, because of its stark and morbid realism.

Human faces occur frequently in the oeuvre of Theodore Gericault, though perhaps not as frequently as the horse. Into the horse Gericault directs all his instincts for love, violence and sensuality. The human face Gericault reserves for the most mundane and least erotic of emotions: those that attended the grind of everyday life in the unruly and dangerous cities of London and Paris of the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Gericault was an artist intimately connected and involved with life in his society and this can be seen clearly in the faces that he chooses, particularly during and after his visits to London.

Portraiture has traditionally occupied an ambivalent space between the categories of high and low art:

Mobile though the status of portraiture became within the hierarchy of genres throughout the nineteenth century, it remained beneath biblical, mythological and historical subjects and even below landscapes on the scale of moral values that pervaded most aesthetic judgments.²⁷

Yet the subject of the face is intriguing in any study of Gericault. He did not paint in the accepted style of portraiture, nor in the manner of 'honorific portraiture', but seems rather to have documented faces as they appeared all around him. He portrays intimate faces connected with culture, not the high culture of the drawing room, but the street culture, the everyday faces of the metropolis. These were the faces of difference, of 'otherness', of powerless people who inhabited the same environment as he, but who assumed none of his privileges. This was a time of an ever-encroaching, disaffected and sometimes militant populace (Fig. 5) and in the features portrayed by Gericault we glimpse the marginalized human being that was just beginning to emerge within the social consciences of the liberal bourgeoisie in Paris and London.

A case can be made for Gericault's fascination with the human visage. He is an accurate and minute recorder of human facial statement and characteristic. It is as if he uses the face as a device or metaphor in order to represent the psychological and physical condition of the human body. A careful study of Gericault's human imagery can reveal an emphasis on the visage up to and including the monomaniac paintings. (Fig. 6-9)

The face with its myriad of expressions and unique characteristics can and often does, stand in place of the full human body. More than the body, the face reveals human emotion and state of mind. It is this that Gericault seeks out with a compassionate and objective eye, and in doing so reflects the condition and preoccupations of humanity at a particular point in history.

In turning away from the Classical tradition, Gericault sought a vehicle/subject that could carry forward the notion of the 'dramatic' in art. The world that Classicism had represented was in a process of dissolution and it was evident that the Classical body could now only appear theatrical – a farce:

Gericault's genius was to reconfigure the idea that the most truthful representation of real and profound human suffering is capable of signaling a deeper truth about the human condition.²⁸

What is startling in the work of Gericault, particularly in his depictions of human beings, is the almost complete lack of device and moral judgment. It is not the artist's sympathetic rendering of his subject matter that moves the viewer of his work, but rather the complete lack of sentiment. Thus his work contains the qualities of some types of photography: documentary, medical/scientific and police photography. It is as if, like the camera, Gericault captures a fleeting statement of contemporary life in the faces that he draws and paints. Like a documentary photograph, there is no forward or afterward, just the immediate instant.

It is evident that Gericault's dedication to elucidating the human face as a vehicle for the expression of the physical condition of the body, culminates in the five extant paintings that have an extraordinary power to move the observer two hundred years on. These five paintings are of monomaniacs. They were completed sometime after his return from London. Although the monomaniacs were not imaged directly from the street, they do reference the 'other'. These are faces of physically, morally and psychologically incarcerated human beings.



Fig. 1
The Five Monomaniac Portraits, Theodore Gericault, c.1822/23



Fig. 2
Charles Bell's 'Madness' from his Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting (London: Longman et al., 1806), (cited Sander L Gilman, p31)



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Fig. 3

Demonomaniacs, Georges-Francois Gabriel

Reproduced in Dictionnaire des sciences medicales, VIII, Plate 2 (Cited Albert Boime, 'Portraying Monomaniacs to Service the Alienist's Monomania: Gericault and Georget' pp.82)



Fig. 4

The Charging Chasseur, oil, 1812



Fig. 5
Assassins Plotting the Murder of Fualdes, black chalk and wash, 1818 (cited Eitner pp.158)

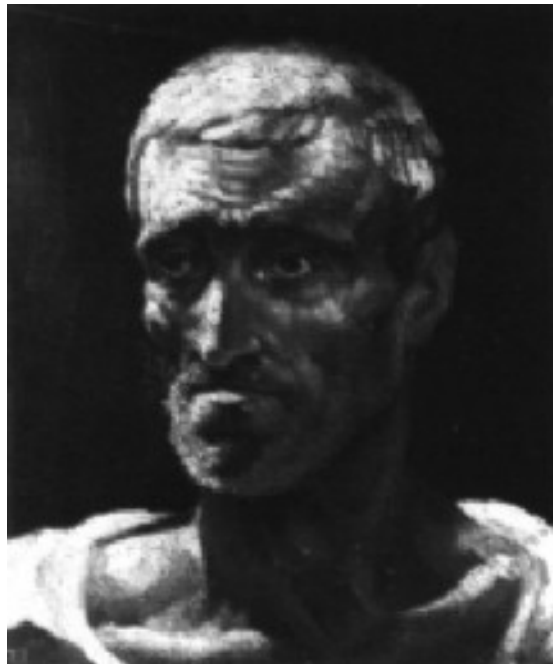


Fig. 6
Portrait Study of an Elderly Man, oil, 1818/19 (cited Eitner pp.184)



Fig. 7
Portrait Study of a Black Man, oil, 1818/19 (cited Eitner pp.185)



Fig. 8
Portrait of a Turk, oil, 1822/3 (cited Eitner, pp.265)



Fig. 9
Cockney Porter, pencil and watercolour, c.1820 (cited Eitner pp.222)



Fig. 10
General Letellier After His Suicide, pencil, 1818 (cited Eitner, pp.159)



Fig. 11
The Raft of the Medusa, oil, 1819 (cited Eitner, pp.309)



Fig 12
Study of Dissected Limbs, oil, 1818/19 (cited Eitner pp.183)



Fig. 13
Severed Heads, oil, 1818/19 (cited Eitner pp.310)



Fig. 14
Public Hanging in London, pencil and wash, c.1820 (cited Eitner, pp.223)

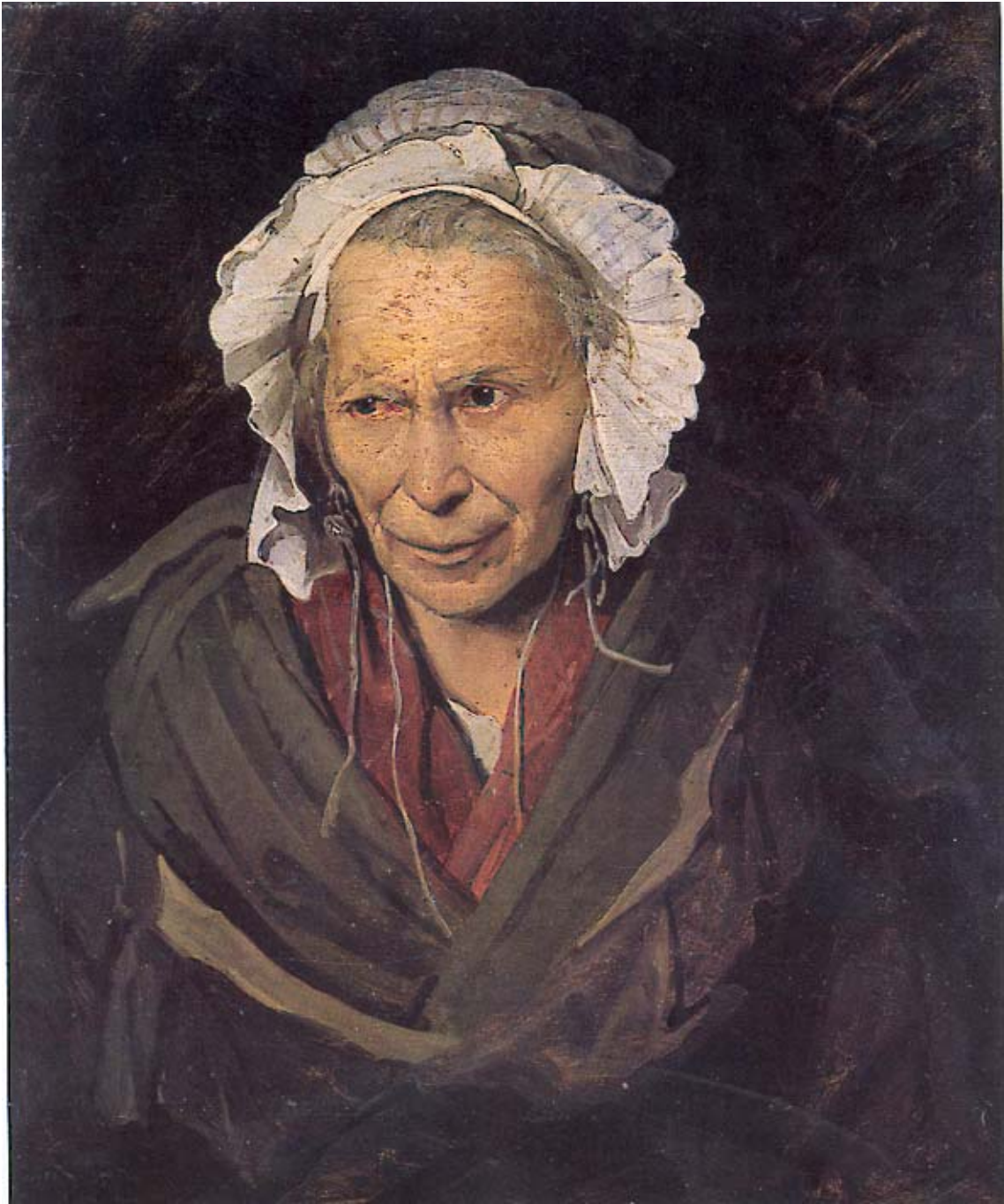


Fig. 15
Portrait of a Woman Suffering from Obsessive Envy, oil, c.1822 (cited Eitner, pp.317)



Fig. 16
Portrait of a Man Suffering from Delusions of Military Rank, oil, c.1822 (Cited Eitner, pp.315)



Fig. 17
Portrait of a Woman Addicted to Gambling, oil c.1822 (Cited Eitner, pp.316)



Fig. 18
Portrait of a Kleptomaniac, oil, c. 1822 (Cited Eitner, pp.314)

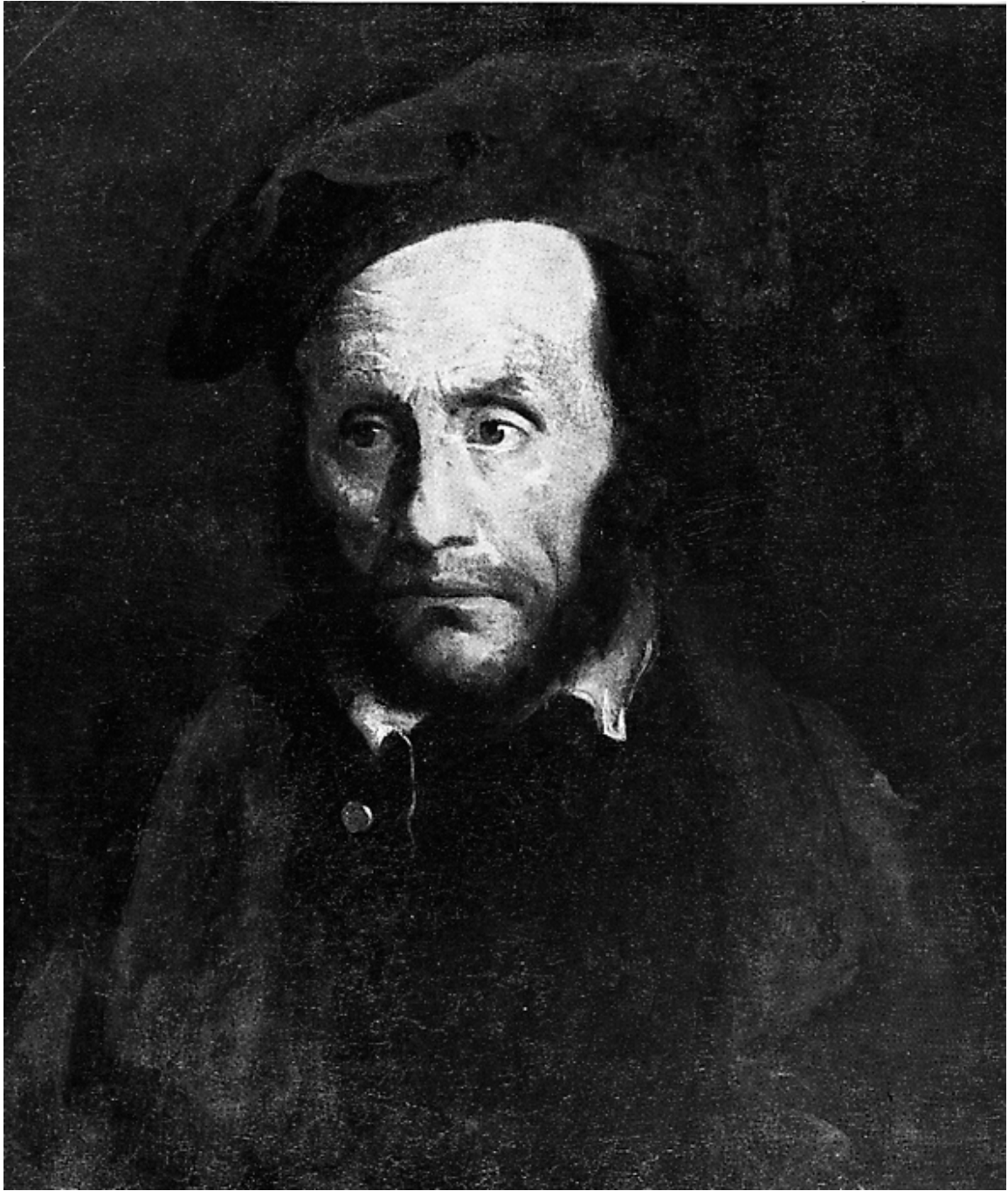


Fig. 19
Portrait of a Kidnapper, oil, c.1822 (Cited Eitner, pp.238)

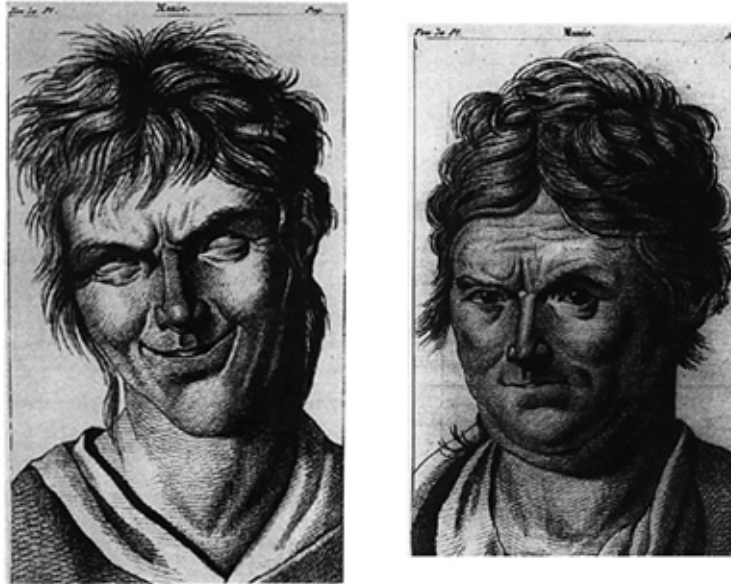


Fig. 20

A maniac and A Maniac Cured, Georges-Francois-Gabriel: reproduced in Dictionnaire des sciences medicales, XXX, Plate 1 (cited Albert Boime, pp.83)



Fig. 21

Patient, Lynda Edridge, pencil and ballpoint, 2002

By analysing the following three images by Gericault, produced prior to his monomaniac series, it is possible to follow a tenuous trail of what excited his imagination as an artist and what were some of his preoccupations as a thinker. Of interest, are the faces of the subjects of these earlier paintings and drawings. All three of these works are very different in technique but their points of unity are an adherence to realism, an unemotional, factual rendering of the human body, in extreme conditions, in its most abject state with an emphasis on the face and expression conveyed thereabouts. By focusing on the appearance of the face as portrayed in these works by Gericault, it should be possible to trace the preoccupation of the artist with the representation of the human visage, a preoccupation that culminates and ends with the monomaniac series of paintings. Because these art works record daily events so objectively, they contain some of the elements of documentary record keeping, just as photographic documentary evidence would later in the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century.

General Letellier after his Suicide (1818) (Fig. 10)

This is a small and intensely beautiful drawing by Gericault. General Letellier was an acquaintance of Gericault's, and one day when Gericault and another friend called on the General, they discovered him dead on his pillows. Without resorting to melodrama, Gericault immediately made a drawing of the scene that demonstrates a lucidity and impartiality of vision that he would later consciously develop. In this drawing there is no melodrama, no blood nor gaping wound. Simply the expired features of his acquaintance propped up by pillows and the gun, almost obscured by the sheets of the bed. This man could be asleep but for the nearly closed and lifeless eyes, and the slack mouth and jaw.

In this image we are presented with the face of death, but not a tortured or unwilling death. Here is death, whose moment has been carefully chosen, its setting arranged to be peaceful and not in the least unsightly.

The Radeau de la Meduse (Raft of the Medusa) (1819) (Fig. 11)

No account, it seems of Gericault's life and work, would be complete without some analysis of this grand, somewhat peculiar, but very important historical painting. The painting was exhibited at the 1819 Salon, and it was not well received by the mainstream art critics of the time. However, amongst Gericault's milieu and peer group it was considered to be a masterpiece. As well as being an overtly political painting, it was also a clear critique of the School of Classicism that had been, until this moment, the prevailing dominant statement in art. Gericault was trained in this tradition and so was uniquely placed, by virtue of his liberal thinking and classical education, to be able to articulate a series of 'original and pointed questions.'²⁹ He depicts, on a grand scale, in the tradition of classical historical painting that was the most elevated genre in the academic hierarchy of fine arts, the helplessness and terror of the survivors of a shipping disaster, where fault clearly lay with the monarchist government, but compensation was denied to the survivors.

The subject of this painting was a contentious issue between the Parisian liberal thinkers and the Bourbon bureaucracy in 1819. It was a very current event, barely history, and it was not a classical subject. The structure and motifs of the painting reference but subvert the classical ideal, both in terms of heroic events (which this was not, although Gericault constructed it as if it were), and in the bodies that sprawl across the raft.

The elderly gentleman nearest to the viewer in the painting takes the classical pose of the philosopher/sage. He sits gazing abstractedly from the back of the raft, directly at the viewer. Casually draped under his left arm is the dead body of his son. Perhaps he contemplates the

meaning of it all. He seems strangely out of place, a figure of calm in a crescendo of turbulence. He is the figure of pure classicism, looking backward, not forward, out of place and out of touch with the terrible reality all around him.

It is the face that confronts the viewer of this painting. All others are turned away as if to escape the viewer's gaze. Salon audiences were largely conservative and so this device also directly addresses the viewer as a kind of challenge, for eyes are always drawn to faces. Though inky dark, this face challenges the viewer to consider the ideas before them. In a sense it seems as if Gericault pays a kind of homage to Classicism by leading the viewer into the painting through the classical figure, then away into the future by the figure of the 'other' - the negro, whose sublimated and enslaved status Gericault and others were attempting to redeem.

There is one heroic moment in the painting: the black man, rising triumphantly above the mass of twisting survivors, the dying and the dead bodies, raising a flag to signal their (or his) existence to the distant rescue ship. He leads the survivors of the bloodbath away from the chiseled figure of classicism and away from the audience of the Salon. The metaphor here was not just overt, it was obvious. The abolition of slavery and the slave trade was a central issue amongst friends and contemporaries of Gericault.

In order to render this painting as realistically as possible, Gericault went to extraordinary lengths in his research. He seems to have been determined to record as accurately as possible both life and death on the raft. He met with two of the survivors, one of whom was the ship's doctor, J.B. Henri Savigny and the other Alexandre Correard. Correard was an ardent liberal and had become a one-man band in the politicization of the Medusa disaster. Both of these men were responsible for the detailed publication of their account of the disaster (*Naufrage de la fregate la Meduse faisant partie de l'expédition du Senegal*), flying in the face of the authorities that had no intention of sharing the details with the general public.

It was in his pursuit of realism, that Gericault obtained a macabre collection of decapitated human head/s (Fig. 13) and limbs (Fig. 12) from a hospital near his studio. These he also painted, arranged in various positions, alluding to perverse acts of coitus.

According to his first biographer, Charles Clement, he spent considerable time in the hospital in order to 'follow with ardent curiosity all phases of suffering, from the first seizure to the final agony, and to study the traces they imprint on the human body.'³⁰

The Raft of the Medusa is an enormous painting (20' x 18') and thus the figures in the drama are depicted almost life-size. This adds a tremendous sense of realism to the final image as the viewer almost feels as if they could step onto the Raft to become a participant in the turbulent scene.

It was clearly Gericault's purpose to draw the beholder into a close, empathetic participation with the action of this picture. The accessibility of the raft and the nearness of the figures were to compel the viewer to place himself in the picture's perspective: his eyes filled with the raft's wide spread, his vision channeled by the gestures of the men before him ... he was made to share the experience of the shipwrecked men.³¹

The Medusa painting presents the viewer with, at first glance, a grand narrative of history in the historical tradition of Classicism. What Gericault does, though, is to cleverly subvert the devices of such painting to give it an entirely different reading altogether.

In 1820/21, Gericault set off for England where he was to hang his *Raft*. Whilst there, he immersed himself in the making of pictures (mainly lithographs and drawings) and of seeing what English art had to offer. Prior to his arrival in England he had been somewhat tepid in

his assessment of the English style. However, on 1 May 1821, after having viewed the Royal Academy's summer exhibition, he wrote in glowing terms to his friend, the artist, Horace Vernet of the contents of the exhibition.

How I wish that I could show, even to some of our ablest artists, these portraits that so much resemble nature, whose easy poses leave nothing to be desired, and of which one could truly say they lacked only speech! ... I shall mention to you only the one figure that seemed the most perfect to me, and whose pose and statement bring tears to the eye, however one might resist. It is the wife of a soldier who, thinking only of her husband, scans the list of the dead with an unquiet and haggard eye ... There are no signs of mourning [in the scene], on the contrary, the wine flows at every table ... Yet Wilkie achieves the last degree of pathos, like nature itself.³²

***Public Hanging in London (1819/20)* (Fig. 14)**

The streets of London, 'so full of movement'³³ seemed to fascinate him. Although the desperate slums must have filled him with horror, they were obviously compelling for him as an artist. During this period he spent hours drawing in small sketchbooks figures from the streets. Beggars, paupers, the infirm and crippled, characters and events pour from his pages. In London, Gericault was able to completely dissociate himself from the traditions of Classicism. Such traditions were entirely absent in London as they were not in Paris.

Drawing allows the artist a space for formal and conceptual experimentation and it is in the drawings from this time in London that Gericault seals his pact with reality and objectivity. He allows only the subject matter to convey its own passions and extremities without the subterfuge of device:

With something akin to a reporter's inquisitiveness, free from an aesthetic or sentimental bias, he noted his impressions in small sketchbooks, sometimes developing these rapid pencil jottings into larger wash and watercolour drawings. His curiosity was attracted by the characteristic and intimate, by features in which he recognized the special Englishness in persons or situations that came his way. Signs of poverty, suffering and decay drew his attention; his compassion went equally to distressed human beings and overworked animals, but sympathy never blurred the accuracy of his vision.³⁴

At this time, Gericault completed a fairly large wash drawing called *Public Hanging in London*.

Iain McCalman has written at length of the 'radical underworld' that existed in England, particularly in London at this time, in his book, *Radical Underworld. Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*. In this book he brings to light many of the less documented characters that were involved in a myriad of plots and chapels, intent on overthrowing the puritanical British Government of this time:

... Arthur Thistlewood began to make serious plans to assassinate members of the government ... 'From this time', claimed a contemporary observer Alexander Richmond, 'he seemed imbued with the opinion that he should perform some bold and daring act to wipe away the imputation' [the imputation was of spying for the Government]. Wedderburn's speeches at Hopkins Street shared his anger and frustration. He claimed to be goading his sons to violence by taunting them with their degradation and their cowardice in enduring it. Hopkins Street chapel and the Scotch Arms in New Round Court became nerve centers for those prepared to countenance Thistlewood's assassination plans.³⁵

Whether or not Gericault sympathised with the motivations of the Cato Street Gang, is not known, certainly there is no documentary evidence. However, if we are to take into consideration the reading of Gericault's oeuvre by Bruno Chenique, discussed earlier then it could be supposed that Gericault may have felt some sympathy with the characters he depicted. However, in the drawing there is no direct evidence of this sympathy.

The drawing of the hanging by Gericault is an objective, untraditional, documentary of an event. It is a chill and shadowy work. It is a depiction of the hanging of the Cato Street conspirators, at which Gericault must have been a spectator. These men were a gang of radicals who had plotted to murder the Cabinet. Eitner supposes that this picture presents the left side of the gallows in front of the Newgate Prison, with three of the five conspirators (Thistlewood, Tidd and Ings) being readied for hanging.³⁶

The artist and the viewer of this drawing have the most direct and close range view as could have been possible to the event, but there is no histrionic embellishment on the part of the artist. It cannot have occurred often, before photography, that the details and horrors of an actual execution were so prosaically recorded. Gericault has drawn this image as if the event were a mundane and everyday occurrence. The executioners, their faces unseen, matter-of-factly go about their business of readying the conspirators for their deaths. One of the executioners is simply a dark silhouette fixing Ings' rope to the ballast of the scaffold.

The faces of the three conspirators appear in the following ways: the first (presumably Thistlewood) stares fixedly at the viewer, eyes dilated, appearing not to listen to the counsel of the Rev. Mr Cotton. Thistlewood's face is revealed clearly in stark black and white tonality. He appears out of his mind with the terror of his impending death even though the artist does not use exaggerated gesture to achieve this. Although Thistlewood's eyes stare out at his audience, it as if he looks straight through us, there is no connection between the viewer and this face. Thistlewood's face does not see his audience; he is locked in the terror of his impending mortality unaware of all else.

The second conspirator (Tidd) stands very straight, hands tightly clenched, a white hood covers his face, beneath which a vague outline of his features can be seen. His eyes beneath the hood are closed, it is almost as if his mind and body are detached from one another. The face is in repose, at odds with his straight, upright stance and clenched hands. This face could already be the death mask.

The third conspirator's (Ings) body is almost entirely concealed by the executioner who stands in front of him, close, to place the hood over Ings' head. The face of Ings is lightly sketched with pale wash. The features of this face show Ings with his eyes closed, his mouth slack and slightly open and his head tilted back. He does not look into the face of either audience or executioner, yet he is frontal to both.

The faces of the conspirators in this drawing are interesting in that they all face the viewer, the executioner and the priest, yet none of the faces engage, no eyes meet. Each conspirator seems lost in his private and individual misery, detached from their environment and the people within it. It is this detachment, apparent in the faces of the conspirators, reflecting the artist's detachment also, which gives the image pathos, sympathy and dignity, rather than the circumstance of a hanging. It is not the hanging itself that seems of immediate importance to Gericault, but rather the reactions and emotions of the individuals about to be hanged that appear to be of greater consequence and interest to the artist.

Perhaps Gericault has realized in this image, the profound statement that can be made by emphasising the visage of his subjects: that the face itself is capable of conveying both the state of mind and body to the viewer in a less theatrical way than can that of the body.

The monomaniacs, honorific portraiture and medical illustration

The paintings of monomaniacs by Theodore Gericault operate not only as clinical renditions of monomaniacs, but also as objective portraits of individuals, who while disturbed, are nevertheless fully human. In these paintings, Gericault combined a degree of objective

curiosity and a natural empathy for his subjects' condition. I believe that the dialogue between Georget and Gericault underpins these paintings, allowing them to speak powerfully today not necessarily of the precise condition of monomania, but certainly that of 'unreason'.

The five monomaniac paintings seem to occupy a space somewhere between medical illustration and honorific portraiture. I believe the impetus was to achieve a combination of artistic, scientific, political and moral imperatives. So much of the Gericault oeuvre depicts a visual social commentary of the concerns and events of his time. He brings to these portraits a reality that reaches beyond the concerns of Georget to touch an emotional and psychological chord in the beholder. This still resonates with the viewer two hundred years on, even though the science that stimulated their production has been repudiated.

There is a document from 1863, held in the Louvre archives which states that between 1820 and 1824, Gericault, a friend of Doctor Georget, chief of Salpetriere, wished to paint some studies of the insane from life...³⁷ How Gericault became connected with Dr Georget is open to speculation, but that Gericault had personal experience of mental illness is known and variously documented. A strain of it ran through four generations of Gericault's family on his mother's side. His grandfather had been confined to an asylum in 1773 and died insane in 1779. An uncle and a cousin were also diagnosed insane, and Gericault's own son by his aunt died in circumstances that suggest he was not of sound mind.³⁸ Gericault seems to have suffered some form of breakdown in 1819 and it is possible that around this time he may have sought the advice of Dr Georget in his professional capacity as a psychiatrist. Gericault's friend, Rene Richard Castel, the botanist and poet wrote:

[Gericault's physician is] very worried about his patient who imagined that the bargemen and the people on the river boat were enemies spying on him and plotting his ruin. Frail human reason! What a sad accident.³⁹

Certainly, evidence from his letters suggests that, at the very least Gericault, was a very highly-strung character. In a letter from Italy to his intimate friend, Dedreux-Dorcy, he writes

Why have you left me, my friend, or rather: why does an adverse fate keep us separated? You understood me and I loved you; this was truly a source of peace and happiness to me. Now I am disoriented and confused. I try in vain to find support; nothing seems solid, everything escapes me, deceives me. Our earthly hopes and desires are only vain fancies, our successes mere mirages that we try to grasp. If there is one thing certain in this world, it is our pains. Suffering is real, pleasure only imaginary.⁴⁰

Given the history of insanity that ran in Gericault's family and the documentary evidence of his own emotional instability, it would seem reasonable to assume that Gericault did in fact suffer some sort of psychotic episode. It is also possible that Etienne Georget treated him and this may have formed the basis for a collaboration that would lead to the paintings of the monomaniacs.

For a psychiatrist who may have required an artist for a project specifically requiring the most objective and accurate projection possible for the human being turned insane, Theodore Gericault would most perfectly have suited his needs. Gericault stood out from his peers as a painter. He could paint flesh with the vitality of Rubens and Rembrandt. He was a superb and clever draughtsman. He could paint with accuracy, speed and a sureness of touch that amazed many of his contemporaries. All these qualities would be needed to effectively render from life, mentally disturbed individuals.

There are a number of attributes that isolate the portraits of monomaniacs from honorific portraiture and medical illustration of the time and by which we as contemporary viewers can understand them outside and within these two genres.

Apparent is the obvious unease, or dis-ease of the subjects of the paintings, their apparent remoteness and their withdrawn gazes. The subjects/objects of the painterly gaze do not participate in a kind of mutual 'looking'. There is no discourse between painter and subjects or in the final analysis between the subjects and the viewer. They seem simply to exist. It is this remoteness, I believe, that conveys a kind of truth. The painter paints his subjects as they are without indication to their condition and the subjects of the portraits make no attempt to imprint their personalities, ideas, states of mind, etc... They sit or stand because they have been asked or ordered to, no more, no less.

At least, at first glance this seems to be the case. However, in a sublimated way, Gericault has allowed his subjects a sense of themselves. The patients appear to have made an effort with their appearance and Gericault has allowed them this individuality, enhancing it by carefully detailing items about their clothing; ribbons, bonnets, medals, hats, etc. This alludes to an aspect of honorific portraiture where the sitter often has about her objects or artifacts that indicate social status or personal preoccupations. In honorific portraiture, the attributes signifying wealth and status within society are often lovingly detailed, whether it is the richness of a particular fabric or an object of some symbolic value. However, the details that Gericault delineates for each monomaniac are almost insignificant and totally subsumed by the power in the moulding of the facial features in each painting.

In fact, by the inclusion of these extraneous objects: objects that are contradictory, such objects as might actually be found about the subject of an honorific portrait, Gericault ensures the utter anonymity and strange peculiarity of each individual patient. These objects are not consistent with the ravaged features that indicate the extreme physical conditions of the body.

Eitner suggests that glimpses of the influence of the English portraitist, Thomas Lawrence, may be seen in the animation of the features and the naturalness of the monomaniac paintings.⁴¹ It seems probable that Gericault did associate with or at least view images by Thomas Lawrence during the time he spent in London.

The serial format of the Gericault portraits is also unusual in honorific portraiture, though this is not so of medical illustration, that, in a sense, relies on the serialisation of imagery in order to make clear the path of scientific argument. All five of the portraits adhere to roughly the same dimensions and are approximately life-sized images as opposed the small and publishable drawings by the likes of Gabriel. The paintings by Gericault, on the other hand, would not be publishable unless they were reproduced as lithographs. To date, there is no documentary evidence to suggest that Georget or anyone else ever published the monomaniac paintings.

Albert Boime argues that if the missing five paintings of monomaniacs ever came to light then we would perhaps be privy to the scientific intention of these paintings to aid in the identification of the condition of Monomania. He argues that in medical illustration at the time, it was common to draw patients before treatment and then again after treatment, showing the effects of the cure upon the person, usually represented by the visage, of the patient:

I wish to propose that it was this 'before and after' application of the sketches which influenced the practice of Esquirol's disciple Georget, who commissioned the painter Gericault to make a series of studies of mentally ill patients. Clement, who wrote the catalogue raisonne of the painter's works, stated that he knew of ten portraits of the mentally ill, but could account for only five of them. The neat split of the series suggests a pairing, and it is likely that the lost set represented a different phase of the mental state of the same patients in the extant canvases.⁴²

Boime speculates that the missing five portraits are ‘after the cure’ depictions of the same subjects. This would certainly locate these portraits more specifically within a medical illustration field. However, it is impossible to prove or disprove this supposition as neither the missing paintings nor appropriate documentation has been unearthed that would shed more light upon this supposition. The paintings by Gericault are all approximately life-size; the subjects are painted rapidly and realistically with no exaggeration, as opposed to the faces commissioned by Esquirol, in which the features of the face are emphasized so as to illuminate the facial ‘sign’ by which a particular type of madness could be recognized.

Georges-Francoise Gabriel (1775-c.1850) was one of a number of artists commissioned by Esquirol to draw images of mental patients from life. *A Maniac* and *A Maniac Cured* (Fig. 20) are representative of the types of drawing produced by Gabriel for Esquirol. These two images are head and shoulder view portraits, with special attention to detail. The contortion of the face, the especial lumps and bumps, and the expression of the mouth and eyes, posture, and action all seem to legitimize the so-called symptoms of mental illness. In many other images, the insane individual is shown in full figure, in a variety of contortions and actions indicating his or her insanity, often with the paraphernalia of the psychiatric profession around them. These images by Gabriel and others offer the viewer insanity as a grotesquery, outside of their everyday experience. It is the image of an alien, something not all or not quite human. The images, and others like them, all contain the elements, to a greater or lesser degree, of the qualities put forward by Sir Charles Bell as signs to be illustrated by artists in order to project the character and abnormality of madness to the beholder of these illustrations.

At the Salon of 1814, Gabriel exhibited a series of drawings of mental patients⁴³, and it is possible, indeed likely, that Gericault may have seen them. They predate his own paintings of monomaniacs by almost ten years. It could be argued that the primary factor in the differences in the images of insanity by Gabriel and those by Gericault, is the difference in medium – the graphic versus the plastic.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe commenting on Johan Lavater’s illustrations of physiognomy, in the published text *On Physiognomy* in 1772 addressed the following in correspondence to Lavater:

Thought a bit yesterday about the four mad ones ... how difficult it is to bring the dead etching to life, where character only glimmers through misunderstood lines, where one is in doubt what has meaning and what doesn’t. How different is life!⁴⁴

Immanuel Kant delineated much the same idea in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) when comparing the line drawings of the Renaissance with the silhouettes employed by Lavater to illustrate his publications. Kant concludes that it is the medium that determines the observer’s analysis.⁴⁵

The drawings by Gabriel aim to describe the subject while the paintings by Gericault strive for the reflection on, or illumination of, the subject. However, the differences between the images created by Gabriel and those by Gericault go deeper than their mediums. Gericault reveals few of the behavioral aspects of the insane in the five monomaniac portraits. What is revealed is a “state of mind”, which, though disordered and clinically classifiable, emphasizes rather than obliterates individuality. Gericault does not put the subjects of his paintings in surrounds that might indicate their social status or betray their forced segregation from the world outside the walls of their asylums. They perform no particular action that might characterize their disease, and which would thus isolate them from the experience of the viewer. Gabriel’s images conform to the expectations of Charles Bell and often contain the contraptions of psychiatry, however these qualities are entirely absent in Gericault’s portraits.

[Gericault's] depictions of insanity are notable for being among the first paintings to humanize the mentally ill and to depict them as recognizable persons upon whom a terrible fate has been visited. If one can discern traces of the classical tradition restraining Gericault from the whole truth in *Raft of the Medusa*, his paintings of the insane do not flinch from the terrible truth about mental illness.⁴⁶

In comparing the paintings of monomaniacs by Gericault with the medical illustration commissioned from artists such as Gabriel, I have come to believe that these paintings were not entirely intended as instruction in the medical or scientific diagnosis and detection of insanity, but that they also address the question of 'how does one know that the 'other' is mad?' These paintings could equally be a private meditation on the nature and quality of insanity by an artist who had some personal experience with unreason, or who simply found the subject of insanity profound and metaphoric.

While there is subtle referencing to both honorific portraiture and to medical illustration in these portrait paintings by Gericault, it is evident that they clearly stand outside of both genres whilst retaining aspects of both.

No preparatory drawings for the monomaniac paintings have so far come to light and it is generally supposed that these paintings were largely painted in one sitting. There is no evidence of alteration to the composition of the finished works. Courthion described Gericault's method of working:

... He did not, like most painters, begin by sketchily blocking in the entire canvas, to be gone over in detail later. Rather, he would choose a head or a whole figure and execute it completely, without for the moment bothering with the rest of the picture. This eccentric manner of work however did not prevent the whole of the composition from achieving a felicitous harmony.⁴⁷

In 1867, Charles Clement penned the first descriptions of the five monomaniac paintings. The descriptions seem quaint, with the emphasis on facial statement, while the painterly aspects are barely discussed at all. In fact, the descriptive tone that Clement uses parallels the tone used by psychiatrists such as Esquirol and Georget, when compiling their lengthy and detailed patient case notes:

Monomania de l'envie. (Portrait of a Woman Suffering from Excessive Envy). (Fig. 15) "We named this woman the hyena. She is wearing a bonnet. The bonnet is coloured with white ribbons. Convulsed features, ugly, with bloodshot eyes".⁴⁸

In contrast, Kenneth Clark called this particular painting 'one of the greatest pieces of painting of the Nineteenth Century'.⁴⁹

Gericault's rendition of these five monomaniacs captures an intense psychological moment in paint. Their faces emerge from the gloom, naked and vulnerable, while their bodies remain entirely in shadow. The emphasis is on the expressive physiognomies of the subjects. Gericault relied entirely on the subtleties of colour, tone and texture to achieve a sombre effect that imparts a sense of oppression and containment that was their bodily condition. There is no escape for these individuals from their condition. The only source of light present in any of these paintings is that which emanates from the face of the subject – the sufferer of monomania.

In Gericault's portrait of the woman addicted to gambling (Fig. 17), we view her from slightly above, thus placing the observer (painter, psychiatrist, beholder) in a position of power and authority. Her features are waxy and her facial statement is immobile and absorbed. The stillness is in contrast to the looseness and fluidity of the paintwork. It is at this juncture, between stillness and tempestuousness, that the viewer accesses the reality of

the suffering of this individual. Whilst her outward facial appearance is immobile and stolid, achieved by a heavy trowling of thick oil paint, the remainder of the painting is swiftly and frenetically painted with speedy brush strokes. It is perhaps the contradictions in the application of the paint that conveys the characteristic contradictions of insanity. We see the transitory nature of the condition of monomania, her fleeting statement, her drifting between reason and unreason, her isolation, and her introspection. She is an object of speculation. Here is a visage that epitomizes the very nature of the society from which she was formed and from which she was now isolated. She lacks the animal or criminal intent that characterizes many renditions of the insane by other artists.

These paintings occupy a space precisely at the intersection of art and science. It is at this juncture, where the artist is looking at his subject both in terms of scientific investigation and artistic imagination – a compassionate objective gaze – that these paintings are still able to move a beholder to speculate as to their purpose and meaning.

The individuals depicted in these paintings transcend the parameters of purely scientific enquiry, and enter into a subjective and personal dialogue with the viewer that questions the experience of madness. It is in fact through the contradictions of objective clinical science and subjective, sympathetic rendering that these portraits resonate with the *experience* rather than the *appearance* of insanity.

Conclusion

The emergence of the discipline of psychiatry, the rent in the social fabric of Europe, the crisis of representation in French painting are historical circumstances that coincide with Gericault's emergence as a painter at the time of the Restoration in France. It is these three themes that I believe comprise the source of inspiration for Gericault to produce the work that he does, culminating in the extant five images of the monomaniacs.

These paintings have hovered uneasily between being explained away in terms of the Romantic notion of madness and the peculiarities of nineteenth century science, neither accepted as honorific portraiture nor as scientific documentation. Boime's view is that these paintings were, in a sense, 'commissioned' by Georget to attain the acceptance of psychiatry into the parameters of the medical and legal professions, to legitimise and give adequate status to the nascent psychiatric profession. Whilst this may be true, to a greater or lesser extent, it is this unilateral approach that has contributed to the monomaniac portraits being generally consigned to the status of nineteenth century medical illustration or dismissed as first an abomination, and later an aberration.

Gericault's collaboration or involvement with the psychiatrist, Etienne Georget, and the concerns of this individual were obviously integral to the making of these works. However, whether Georget employed Gericault to paint these pictures, or whether Gericault enlisted Georget's assistance with a personal project is open to debate. Even if Georget did hire Gericault, I believe, that whatever objective point of view Gericault may have initially brought to the painting of these people, was overridden by the intense physical and emotional proximity that necessarily occurs on the part, at least, of the artist, when painting a portrait from life. He brings both a compassionate and an objective gaze to bear upon the subjects of these portraits, which accesses both the emotive and objective faculties in the beholder.

In these paintings, the qualities of reason and reverie are consonant; neither takes a dominant position over the other. They stand outside the genre of medical illustration by being sensitive yet objective portrayals of the subjects of these paintings. Here there is no distinct characterisation of madness, no dehumanising of the individual, but rather a reflection, a meditation, on madness and its affect on those so afflicted.

While Boime states that his argument is Foucaultian, I believe a full Foucaultian study of these paintings would apply as much, if not more analysis to the concerns of the artist in the production of these works. So little actual evidence exists that illuminates the precise nature of the relationship between Georget and Gericault that it seems to me that equal analysis should be applied to Gericault's life and work as to that of Georget's. I think it seems likely that Gericault was indeed fascinated by the notion of 'unreason', and he quite possibly may have sought out Georget's assistance either or both as a patient and an artist. And, quite probably Georget was interested in collaborating with Gericault and providing him access to patients. However, to apply more credit to the alienist than to the artist is to deny the wider concerns and particular vision inherent to the portraits of monomaniacs.

There is a pattern of portraiture within the oeuvre of Gericault that I believe reflects his struggle to depict the faces of 'otherness' that concerned society. These include those that were poor and destitute, the manual worker, those that were maimed, the dead, those about to die, the foreigner and the negro, and not least the mad. All of these groups of individuals were becoming highly politicized concerns in early nineteenth century Europe and were at the heart of political and social upheavals. It is this scene that Gericault turns his attention to, perhaps because to portray anything else would have seemed less than 'real', a theatre in comparison to the drama of life for those outside of the 'privileged few'.

The ambivalence towards portraiture by art connoisseurs, has allowed portrait painters and artists who worked periodically in the genre, certain freedoms and latitudes that may not otherwise have been possible. It has led to strange pairings and convoluted paths through the borders and frontiers of the varying disciplines of art and science. The discipline of psychiatry has also occupied a similarly ambivalent space, negotiating the boundaries of religion and superstition, medicine, law, science, philosophy and the arts throughout its continuous development.

The face is, as the Swiss preacher and author, Johann Lavater stated in 1753 'the theatre on which the soul exhibits itself.'⁵⁰ That the human face has always been a compelling source for diagnosis and an equally compelling source for artists is beyond doubt. Here, in the monomaniacs, we see the result of a conjoining of influences on the artist and on an early protagonist of the psychiatric discipline.

Gericault painted many portraits, most of them are of unnamed individuals. Labels of race, age, gender and physical condition (usually extreme) instead have been applied to them, either by the artist or by the generations of art experts who have written of them. These faces reveal the wretchedness of life about him. Many artists, particularly the burgeoning and active lithographic artists, drew their inspiration from the streets and gutters of society. Whilst re-inforcing the wretchedness of many people they also caricatured their physical attributes into grotesque masks of what they really were. Gericault, on the other hand, catches the immediacy of his subject's expression with concise and accurate marks on paper or canvas. His eye and judgment appears to be generally unerring. And there is little exaggeration of his subject's features, even though emphasis is often on the face in many of his full and group figure paintings and drawings.

In this document I have attempted to present the paintings of monomaniacs by the artist Theodore Gericault as intimately connected to his life that was short and apparently frenetic and which spanned the formative years of the nineteenth century. The events and people of these years, their thinking and ideas both in science and art as well as many other disciplines, laid the groundwork and principles for which the nineteenth century would become known. These principles would profoundly influence, in the twentieth century, all aspects of science, politics, philosophy and art. By the twentieth century psychiatry and psychology would

become significant players in all these and many other disciplines. As well they would come to have profound effects upon and within the popular culture of the twentieth century.

So, I end this discourse where I began, at my work with the frail and demented, sketchbook in hand (Fig. 21). I give Thelma her workbook. Formerly a teacher, she can spend her entire day in fixed concentration and attention, writing in an exercise book. The writing is in no known language yet it ebbs and flows with all the undulation of the text that I am writing here. Her concentration is focused and she is immersed in this language of her own making. Bill is crying but the features of his face are utterly immobile as the tears course down his cheeks, I ask him what is wrong. 'Nothing, I'm just feeling romantic, that's all' is his utterly coherent response. I enquire of Nora where her pain is, she replies, 'on top of the cupboard'. I am in awe of these people, their language and the way they think about things. I struggle to understand their reality. What does it mean to be mad? Am I mad, are they, are you?

While Western society generally accords some rights to those that are deemed mentally ill and a wide range of treatments are available, if you happen to be old and mad then you will undoubtedly end your days in a system of incarceration that is sustained by surveillance, locks, fences and tracking devices. Whilst 'physical restraint' is now frowned on and not generally used, 'chemical restraint' is 'economic necessity', reducing the need for staff and helping to sustain a booming pharmaceutical industry. The 'good' it does the patient is to make them 'manageable', but in the process they are reduced to incomprehensible vestiges of the humans they were prior to the onset of the effects of this medication.

Through all of this, I remember the portraits of the monomaniacs by Gericault. For all their distractedness, the faces are true and real portraits of great individuality and, I believe, convey the frailty of human reason.

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