‘Cosi shows us that there is as much madness in the outside world as there is within a mental institution.’ Discuss.

Social/Cultural aspects

-Vietnamese war, during the 1970’s whereby Australian troops fought against the Viet Cong in Vietnam. Many died, there were a lot of student protests to this war (viewing the war as madness and pointless – Nick), often aid being sent to the Viet Cong (Nick), whilst they used the aid to kill Australian troops, (madness and betrayal – especially to Henry)

- Concepts of love and fidelity had become outdated in their set, replaced by ideals of free love, whereby sex was not considered in its traditional view as an act of love. Leading to individuals defining love not being important as madness (in the asylum), also unawares as to what exactly love encapsulates as is obvious as Julie defines Love as a drug.

-The idea of love is not so important as it is viewed that there is more important things going on in the world at the current time, that is people suffering through famine and terror (partly due to the war). Also that love is the last gasp of bourgeoisie romanticism, that is of the rich, putting a negative spin on what love is, that only the rich can afford to love.

-Lewis’ grandmother was in a mental asylum which would of had an impact upon his understanding and perceptions of madness. Lewis views that society does not know how to handle with those that suffer from a mental illness. That they are just locked away in old places, (old theatre), comment about a coat of paint will be right showing the perception that mental illness is just something that can be fixed easy, the light entering shows the outside word entering the asylum, awareness of mental illness, chink showing the level of interest put into the mental patients. The hole in the roof. Justin not knowing the name of Julie, showing how society lacks an understanding of mental illness, viewing that practices such as doping up on drugs is good enough. The treatments that are being used are not effective, methods are useless and painful.

-Nowra has blurred the boundaries between madness and sanity. In an order to show that it is a fine line and that it is up to an individual’s perception. E.g. some view the war as madness whilst others as a necessary cause (Nick and Henry, contrasting opinions) also the physical nature of the patients is that they are no different from a ‘normal’ individual, obvious as Lewis mistakes Roy for a social worker and Justin mistakes Lewis as a patient. Also they seem to be able to function effectively at learning lines, showing that they are not the stereotypical patient, that further understanding is needed. Julie drug abuse- not mental illness further showing lack of knowledge. Further showing the lack of effect is the endings for the patients after COSI

-However patients in some lights are more humane and sane, as the outside world seems to be mad with all the conflict and the abandonment of ideas that have held steady through time, the free love and fidelity. Patients are also more positive.

-style of language used differs to that of older era’s. Obvious in the comparison between COSi Fan Tutte and 70’s
COSI STRUCTURAL ASPECTS AND AS A PIECE OF DRAMA

COSI is a piece of drama, play, theatre, production

Clothing that is used by the actors is reflective of characters personalities, therefore Nick, Lucy, Lewis and Julie all seem to be in relative normal clothing, casual as is reminiscent of their connection to the feelings of the time. Ruth wears older neat clothes that reflects her illness of OCD, whilst the loud colours and patterns that are adorned by Roy reflect his outgoing and upbeat personality, the contrasting colours potentially showing his eccentric nature. Meanwhile Henry wears neat outfits that would be in line with a professional (former lawyers) or one that was under military discipline as Henry was (father served in the military)

The idea of a play within a play could give an idea of madness and chaos that could be an example of society. In COSI Fan Tutte the play is about love and infidelity, whereas it is being performed in a time that is about free love. This is similar to the notion of war against the protests of peace, the war is madness in the time that it exists, the events are incongruous. This can only be achieved as the events are similar, the war in COSI Fan Tutte and the Vietnamese war in 1970, allows the times to be compared and the social/cultural differences noted.

Nowra uses black comedy/satire in an attempt to maintain interest on a superficial level but also in order to show his perceptions on a lower level.

Irony – when Roy says its all in my head this is a ironic as mental illness was viewed as being in ones head, humanity exists between the patients, the share jokes in comparison to the cold severe outside world, shown as Roy talks about Henry having verbal diarrhoea

Language of the characters reflects personalities, Doug is very confronting and blunt/crude, Zac’s slow talk and phrasing of words shows his disconnection due to societies ‘treatments’. Ruth’s vocab seems to be very direct and straightforward, neat, considering that she suffers from OCD.

However the patients are also shown that they are in fact mad, though they may not fit the stereotypical mould. Obvious as Roy breaks in

QUOTES

“Love is not so important nowadays” – Lewis on Love
“Give her a poke” – Doug Crude Language
“And you want to remain true to your lovers. It’s an old fashioned concept” – Nick on Love
“love is hallucinating without drugs” – Julie on Love
“I have sex with him and sleep with you” – Madness about love
“only mad people in this day and age would do a play about love and infidelity” –Nick
“thousands of Vietnamese are being killed by American troops”
“traitor”
“Australia is in a war against communists and you. . .you stab my father in the back”
“Not only are they nuts, but they’re right wing nuts”
“It is a war with meaning. It is to stop communism”
“After bread,shelter, equality, health. . maybe comes love. Do you think the starving masses give a fuck about love?”
“How to understand how capitalism exploits the working class is important. How to stop the war in Vietnam is important”
1,2,3,4 We don’t want your fuckin’ war. Radicalise the nation
“You do this old fashioned opera – this is the era of free love and orgies”
“Chink of light enters”
“Burnt wood and mould. Are you sure you know what you’re doing?”
“Coat of paint and it’ll be fine”
“And when you want a lobotomy, you just can’t get it” – black comedy
“They don’t know how to deal with drug users. He called it a crutch, i said it was a rocket to the moon”
“I think his lithium needs to be upped”
“Do it yourself lobotomy”
“funny farm”
“a Mesmer magnet never helped anyone. It was a fraud”
“no one knew what a Mesmer magnet looked like. Dr Posner was there and thought it was a Carlton”
“There’s no such thing as divine madness. Madness is madness”
“A lower dosage. It’s amazing how much more bright the world seems”
“Mad actors are bad enough, but madmen . . .”
“They are normal people who have done extraordinary things, thought extraordinary thoughts”
“Got up on the wrong side of the bed today”
“You’re dealing with a mad audience you know”
“A hero suffering from verbal diarrhoea”
“It’s all in my head”
“Fuck the actresses”
“just a mo”
“A madman is someone who arrives at a fancy dress party dressed in the emperors new clothes”
“Love is the last gasp of bourgeois romanticism”
“He’s doing a play that’s relevant and he’s doing something about the war in Vietnam”
“there’s no such thing as grace under pressure for a burning cat”
I need some uppers
servants dancing on fingertips”– shows Roy’s articulation ability
“but its an easy language. Ask any Italian”
“She can hold a tune but is mechanical in performing” – Ruth performing
“lets make love not war man”
“He’s doped to the eyeballs. He’ll be fine”
“barricades and bombs” why not?”
“throwing rocks at cops, overturning cars, smashing barricades, burning houses”
“Doug has a problem”
“earnest, serious, not many jokes”
“A laugh is as good as a fuck they say”
“taking three steps to herself”
“perspicacious”
“shocked intake of breath at the mention of the four letter word”
“Fuck me dead Lewis. How do you deal with...”
“most women fight hard to keep men out of their pants”
“It’s only a fling. It doesn’t mean anything”
“It’s only sex”
Cosi shows us that there is as much madness in the outside world as there is within a mental institution. Discuss.

In Louise Nowra's COSI, a semi-autobiographical drama, Nowra reveals that there is as much madness in the outside world as exists in an asylum. COSI reveals to the reader that madness does not discriminate; lunacy is no psychological construct and that madness is the perception of normality versus abnormality whereby no boundaries exist. Through the use of COSI Nowra is able to compare the delirium of the outside world to that of the mental institutes during the 1970’s, drawing upon the themes of the era and theatrical concepts in order to encapsulate his message of universal madness. The characters in COSI, those in the asylum condemned as mad by society, play a vital role in the comparison of madness in the outside world, the chaos of politics and Vietnamese war, free love and sex, the new age society and lifestyles, and outright foolishness of the way mentally ill were treated, one of many connections that Nowra has with the play. However in COSI, Nowra does not fail to show the outright mania of the patients, through the use of theatrical structures and conventions, the madness of the patients is juxtaposed with that of the external world and the similarities conveyed through symbolism and other dramatic techniques.

The Vietnamese war and the policies of the government during the 1970’s were chaotic enough, yet against the protests of left wing radicalists, such as Nick and Lucy in COSI, protagonists of the Vietnamese war, society had descended into anarchy, the madness of society comparable to that of a mental institution. War is mad enough yet after the development of nuclear technologies and policies of Mutually Assured Destruction, war, the Vietnamese war was pure inconceivable madness. It was no wonder that protests for the war to cease began, seen in COSI as Nick leads the moratorium against the government “1,2,3,4 we don’t want your fuckin’ war. Radicalise the nation”, his readiness to implore violence utter lunacy, “barricades and bombs, why not?” The actions of protestors fanatical and deplorable as they sought an end to the war “throwing rocks at cops, overturning cars, smashing barricades, burning houses”. However this madness of the outside world is further exacerbated as Nick and Lucy send aid to the Viet Cong, communist enemies of Australia and allies, this betrayal further evidence of the external madness “Australia is at war against the communists and you . . .you ssstab my father in the back”. Through COSI in the theatre, symbolic codes such as props are used to further demonstrate the insanity of the outside world, the “toy soldiers” that Henry plays with, symbolic of the conscription that existed in Australia “Henry takes several toy soldiers out of his pocket and points to them”. These winners of the “lottery”, Australia’s soldiers, equivalent of pawns to be played with, sent off to die in a futile endeavour, absolute and undeniable madness, “Australian soldiers die in a meaningless war . . .we’re losing”. The chaos of war had taken a hold of society, the madness of the war as mad as those whom reside in a mental institute, yet the insanity of the outside world does not end there, at the dawn of a new age of social values.

Throughout time love and sexuality had remained rather permanent, however during the 1970’s through the push of feminist groups and the events of the time such as the Vietnamese war, old concepts and ideals gave way to new ones, yet this only induced further madness in the outside world. During the 1970’s there was a push for new feminist rights and actions, as a result females became more independent, choices and decisions of the public on age old concepts that had held steady for centuries were challenged, the ideals of love and fidelity replaced by free love and “make love not war”. The structure of COSI as a play within a play allowing the identification of differences in social opinion of love, the value of love in Cosi Fan
Tutte juxtaposed to that of the 1970’s, revealing “Love is not so important nowadays”. However this perception that love is no longer important baffles those in the asylum, “What planet are you from”, the dialogue “looking at Lewis as if he was mad” revealing the madness of the outside world. This transfiguration of love is especially evident in COSI, the way in which Lucy, Nick, Julie, Doug, Zac and initially Lewis, view love compared to that of Ruth, Cherry, Roy and Henry whom offer a more traditional and conservative approach “That's what love is being foolish . . . Love is hallucinating without drugs” and “Love is the last gasp of bourgeois romanticism”. The traditional idea of sex as the true display of love, replaced as being a mere form of satisfaction “It's only sex” the justification absolute absurdity "It's only a fling. It doesn't mean anything", an absurd approximation of such an intimate encounter screaming madness. This new found independence can be seen in Cherry's dialogue and gestures, the boldness and severity as she deals with men evident, “I really don't feel hungry…Yes you do”. It is this new approximation of love and what it really is that creates feelings of madness in the external world, the question of how can love not be important, one that plagues those in the asylum, seemingly shunned in preference for other priorities, shuffled and redefined.

As the concepts of free love and female independence grew and changed, so too did the society's priorities, however it is this subsequent shuffling of priorities that caused further madness in the outside world, as individuals such as Nick and Lucy in COSI replace the important individual necessities with those globally. Through movements in the 1970’s to support others such as the Vietnamese in the war, “thousands of Vietnamese are being killed by American troops” people such as Nick and Lucy have abandoned their need for individual fulfilment through love, their emotions intertwined with the success or failure of their pursuits “How to understand how capitalism exploits the working class is important. How to stop the war in Vietnam is important”. Ultimately this has lead to a somewhat sense of social disconnection “earnest, serious, not many jokes”, madness in comparison to the humanity and humility shown by the patients in the mental institution. Priorities of what was once important, such as love have been replaced, "After bread, shelter, equality, health, maybe comes love. Do you think the starving masses give a fuck about love?” Ideas replaced, the elements replaced seen as “emotional indulgences for the privileged few” whereby madness has become indulging in the traditional beliefs, and any delving considered insanity “You do this old fashioned opera – this is the era of free love and orgies”. It is this removal of importance from elements critical to life in the 1970’s from past eras, the differences between the time periods seen in the dialogue and language used by the characters, such as the “just a mo” of Zac and “through the vicissitudes of life”, that makes the madness of the outside world so evident in comparison to that of life in the asylum. Further example of how Nowra through structural conventions reveals the madness of the external world is through the comparison of two different eras, the play within a play. Whilst the libretto of Cosi Fan Tutte is sweet and indicative of love, new age music and culture is more blunt, shown through the song “Wild thing”, the point of the song that society is now wild, wild and full of madness. Whereby what is deemed correct and normal is anything that neglects love, such as those of Brecht, He’s doing a play that’s relevant and he’s doing something about the war in Vietnam "In the end however, the reasons as to the madness of the outside world cannot be put down simply to change, there exists the madness surrounding the treatments of those with socially deemed madness.

The treatment of mental patients during the 1970’s is something the Nowra is all too aware off, his perception that the supposed treatments and cures for the mental illnesses is even madder
then the patients themselves. Nowra’s grandmothers suffered from mental illnesses and it is through this experience that Nowra can convey his perception of the treatment of mental illness. In the 1970’s Nowra reveals how Australian society lacks an understanding of mental illness and what it incorporated, evident from the start of COSI as the theatre is old and dilapidated, whereby those with mental illnesses are hidden away from society, “burnt wood and mould, the idea that if the problem is hidden away then it does not exist, incomprehensible lunacy. Are you sure you know what you’re doing?” Furthermore Nowra highlights the point about the lack of knowledge of mental illnesses, whereby Julie, an individual with drug abuse is condemned as mad and sent to live in a “funny farm”, through Julie Nowra shows his perception of how knowledge of mental illness is far from complete, “they don’t know how to deal with drug users. He called it a crutch; I said it was a rocket to the moon”, whilst the character Justin the social worker is symbolic in his representation of societies understanding of mental patients. This understanding is that drugs is the solution to solving mental illness, that a “Coat of paint and it’ll be fine” will do the trick, how flippant and ready society is to take the easy option when this is not always the case, “A lower dosage. It’s amazing how much more bright the world seems”. Nowra then reveals the more barbaric techniques employed by doctors in the treatments, the use of shock the rapy and Mesmer magnets, tools that only decades ago were being used in torture, turned into the magical cure, madness yet again. However once again Nowra through the use of dialogue highlights the cloud of uncertainty around mental illness, “no one knew what a Mesmer magnet looked like. Dr Posner was there and thought it was a Carlton” before discrediting the methods adopted as madness “a Mesmer magnet never helped anyone. It was a fraud”, the prop of the shock equipment further evidence of the madness employed by the external world. In the end though, it is evident that the treatments do not work, Henry dies shortly afterwards, Julie dies of a drug overdose and Roy moved from institute to institute. However whilst Nowra unveils the overwhelming madness of the external world, Nowra also reveals the madness that exists within the mental institution.

Although Nowra blurs the line between insanity and sanity, Nowra leaves the reader aware that majority of the patients in the asylum are in fact insane, however the madness of the asylum is of a complementary nature to that of the outside world. Through the use of over exaggerated gestures of the patients, the reader is aware that the patients are mad “His left arm is paralysed and he carries it as if it were in a invisible sling”. Through the interactions between the patients and the use of satire Nowra maintains the fact that the patients are mad, “go burn a cat”, the stories of the patients described through black humour “there’s no such thing as grace under pressure for a burning cat”. Meanwhile the humour adopted by the patients, whilst revealing that they are humane in nature once again reveals their extremities of behaviour “Those lakes can get cold when you’re swimming in them with a dead duck in your mouth... Lewis is astonished by the story. She laughs”. While the costumes used are reflective of the nature and personality of the characters themselves, the bright, loud and colourful attire of Roy complementing his eccentric nature, whereas Ruth is neat and precise in her presentation, her obsessive compulsive disorder evident. However Nowra does maintain that patients although mentally ill, are otherwise normal in nature, evident in the confusion that happens at the star of COSI, whereby Lewis confuses Roy a patient, as the social worker, before Lewis is then mistake as a patient himself. It is this parallax through which Nowra shows that the patients are in fact normal in every other way, “They are normal people who have done extraordinary things, thought extraordinary thoughts” whilst still maintain that they are in fact mentally ill “You’re dealing with a mad audience you know”. In the end Nowra through the use of symbolism and
other dramatic techniques is able to identify the madness of the outside world, whilst still maintaining the madness of the asylum.

In conclusion Louise Nowra's COSI highlights the fact that madness is not confined to a single area, that there is as much madness in the outside world as there is in an asylum. Through the use of structures and conventions and acknowledgement of the historical context, Melbourne in the 1970's, Nowra is able to clearly identify the madness of the external world. The madness of war and politics, the lunacy surrounding the new sexual freedom and independence of women, as well as the insanity of new age priorities, compared to the insanity surrounding the methods used to treat mental illness, all the while consolidating the fact that the patients are in fact mad. In the end it is evident that everyone is mad to some degree, that part of being sane is being a little bit crazy.