

Research Statement
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“If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?”

-Albert Einstein-

Influenced by my background in the arts and my understanding of representation as a representation of reality, research is for me, to search again, to return to something which has been cast aside to look at how it functions. I look for the things that have created dissonance, discomfort, or anxiety and have been dismissed rather than being examined because of their challenging and difficult nature. This query is augmented by an exploration and immersion in a multitude of transdisciplinary subjects and aspects including visual culture studies, and the role of ephemera, theory, history, and consumer objects. With these aspects, I piece together a hypothesis as to what has caused the tension, looking towards the larger implications for the discord in regards to sociopolitical and cultural realities. The hypothesis is tested, not only against the initial site, but also against others that may seem similar or oppositional, to further test not only the original site but also the theories that seem to explain it. I regard research as a phenomenologically motivated, immersive investigation with a positivistic resolution that cyclically leads to more research objects and new theories to address, like an ouroboros eating its own tail.

Currently, I am finishing my dissertation, *The Gooey, the Bloody, and the Just Plain Gross: Exploring the Use of an Abject Visual Methodology in Contemporary Visual Art and Culture*. I have developed a methodology that is best suited for a deep and critical investigation of visual examples of disgust and the abject that politicizes these images and their impact on viewers. The abject, because of its boundlessness, has the potential for radical change and for revolution in both the realm of theory and through a shift in consciousness that can occur in viewers of abject images. However, in art the abject has often been used as shorthand for disgust. Art has ignored the newer theoretical work on the abject that not only acknowledges the abject's deeper meanings but understands it as a tool for marginalization and thus political. My project redresses this through the creation of an abject visual methodology that places the user in an abject position through emphasizing abject viewership and critical reflection in the face of phenomenological disgust. I see my work as developing a more intellectually manageable, yet politically expansive view of the abject that can be used to understand the positive transformative power in dialectically disgusting sites. Not only is Kristeva a major influence in my work, but also Judith Butler's refiguring of the abject, as well as her work on what constitutes a grievable life in relation to the margin.

The abject, visual culture, and Pop Surrealism are all ways to address my true interest: the body, particularly the margins of the body, both literally in terms of the skin and fluids, and the metaphorical margins of the body politic and those that inhabit those border lands and edges. With its attachment to real bodies, my research is not just theoretical, but has real world potential for change and social justice issues. I am also engaged with issues regarding gender and race, holding competitive teaching assistant positions in both Gender and Women's Studies and Asian American Studies at the University of Illinois, which have influenced my research pushing me toward intersectionality, sex studies, disability studies, and fat studies as ways to address the body and marginality.

In the past I have worked in American Indian studies, presenting at the University of Illinois's (Dis)Locating Queer conference and the American Indian Workshop in Leiden, Holland

on indigenous transsexual artist Kent Monkman. I argue that his performance work as Miss Chief Eagletesticle and his paintings of Native Americans sodomizing cowboys represent a kind of tactical abjection to intentionally attack the viewer's boundaries and norms and a queer (re)appropriation of American Indian images.. I have presented at the National Art Education Association conference on numerous occasions, including lectures on Pop Surrealism and designer vinyl toys as emergent art forms, shifts in visual depictions of the self since the rise of postmodernity, representations of Post-Humanism in media and this year *Mothers, Monsters & Menses: The Abject Female Body in Contemporary Art*. I have studied disgust extensively, even outside my dissertation, looking at the push pull aesthetic of sites like La Specola (The Natural History Museum of Florence) which features artistically posed anatomical wax models that bear their internal organs to the viewer and the Body Works exhibitions, even horror films. I have also spent a considerable amount of time with postmodern theories in general, having written my master's thesis on rendering postmodern theoretical practices and methods practices more digestible for introductory level students. For this I designed an interdisciplinary postmodern theory class that provides a brief introduction to multiple fields, methods, and ideas from visual culture, feminism, queer studies and race studies, as well as general ideas of deconstruction, simulacrum, rhizomes, and the decline of metanarratives. Many of the contemporary artists I study and use to teach critical thinking employ feminist art practices or engage with ideas of gender and sexuality, like Kiki Smith, Jenny Saville, and Kara Walker. Even my own artistic practice as a sculptor and a painter deals with cultural assumptions of gender and sexuality, spectacle and revulsion.

In the future I will continue my use of an abject lens to engage in various sites that are both disgusting and appealing. I am currently working with Doctor Laura Hetrick on a psychoanalytic and abject reading of *The Build-A-Bear* experience, and I have plans to look at female artists within the predominantly male genre of Pop Surrealism, having already begun a personal exploration of Tara McPherson. I will additionally look at the abject and its connections to the Lacanian "Real" within outsider art, as is illustrated by the works of Henry Darger, who infamously combined genders in his Vivian Girls. I am also in continuing my study of intersectionality and its connections to sovereignty in indigenous artists like Shelley Niro. I plan to expand my dissertation into a book that would be a visual guide to the abject in contemporary imagery. Moreover, I will continue to present at conferences both domestic and foreign, as well as submit papers to publish in a variety of scholarly journals such as *Studies in Art Education*, the *Journal for Artistic Research*, *Frontiers*, and *Body & Society*